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Pivot to the Future:

Shifting U.S. Strategic Focus in the Middle East and Asia

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Today, U.S. foreign policy is stuck at a crossroads between the Middle East and Asia, with security, and stable oil prices on one side, and economic prosperity and rising powers on the other. Several recent U.S. presidents, including President Obama, have repeatedly affirmed the need to prioritize Asian relations in U.S. foreign policy as economies and militaries in this region continue to grow, however since 2001 this goal has often proven difficult to attain and has been pushed to the margins in favor of what has been viewed as more pressing security needs in the Middle East. Despite this continued effort and attention the United States has given to the problems in the Middle East, progress has been elusive at best, with the serious possibility of U.S. efforts being directly counterproductive to stability in the region. This lack of success in the Middle East has been a result of the United States's inability to learn the lessons from the failure of its historically interventionist policies in the region and their inevitable long term costs. Meanwhile, as the collective economies of Asia continue to grow the United States has been unable to commit the necessary resources to diplomatic and security concerns to the region, which are needed to keep the United States in its position of hegemony in the changing power structure of the new coming era of international power. The ultimate decision that U.S.

policymakers need to make is which region presents the most in terms of potential gains in the context of U.S. diplomatic, military, and financial investment. However, with this decision comes the consideration of the methods that will best achieve the ends it desires. Also, what are the specific advantages to U.S. power that investment in either of these regions would be expected to achieve. In this paper I argue that there are hard lessons that can be learned from U.S. intervention in the Middle East, as well as the present situation there, that can help make the necessary shift much easier for U.S. policy makers to make. Additionally, these lessons present good starting points for the formation of a more coherent foreign policy in general; one essentially defined by a smart and measured retrenchment, as well as a more restrained conception of U.S. foreign intervention and what the real priorities are for the United States in the context of its global hegemony. Considering these factors, the United States should strive to create a new foreign policy that minimizes intervention as well as involvement in the Middle East due to minimal vital interests in the region and a fundamental lack of legitimacy that makes the security situation impossible to solve in the near term. Also, by ramping up its diplomatic efforts, strengthening its economic ties, and restructuring its military footprint in Asia, the United States can put itself in an ideal position to counter the only real threat to U.S. power, in a region that has significant potential for economic gains. Lastly, by making these investments using soft power strategies, such as participating in international institutions and investing in foreign aid, rather than the traditional uncompromising hard power politics, the United States will avoid several unfortunate consequences it created for itself in the Middle East and lay a foundation for positive relations over the long term rather than settling for short term results.

In the first section of this paper, I will give a brief explanation of the history of U.S. intervention in the Middle East as a means to set the context of what the U.S. position is in the region right now. Then I will point out the numerous costs the United States has acquired in carrying out its historical pattern of physical and financial intervention which has sought to preserve the status quo it saw as stable. Finally, I will lay out my vision for a coherent way forward in the Middle East which largely sees the United States as an offshore balancer who relies diplomatic measures to advocate for democratic reform from within, and is more tolerant of emerging actors whose goals are less in line with U.S. interests.

What Hath We Wrought: The Failures of Expediency in the Middle East

While a comprehensive history of United States - Middle East relations cannot be fully discussed here, it is largely agreed upon that for over half a century the U.S. security policy in the Middle East has centered around two primary objectives, to ensure stable oil prices, and to protect American access to Gulf oil by whatever means necessary (Jones, 2012). The means that the United States has used in achieving this goal have historically been to simply ensure “pro-American” regimes stay in power by either providing them with weapons (Saudi Arabia, Iran), eliminating their political rivals (Mossadeq), or more recently even direct intervention when our interests are challenged (Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait) (Jones, 2012). Furthermore, these “friendly” regimes have most often been authoritarian dictators whose own domestic politics, not to mention their very existence, have run in direct opposition to the essential values the United States claims to advocate abroad (Jones, 2012). While many defend these policies by claiming that it is hard to argue with success, as demonstrated by the steady flow of oil and “stable” balance of power the United States has achieved in the past, over the long term this method of

ensuring U.S. energy security, and regional stability by propping up weak and illegitimate puppet regimes has come to seriously undermine American interests and security, a problem which U.S. policy makers are dealing with today (Jones, 2012).

Aside from the three or so decades of continuous war in the Middle East and the arming of actors who often change alliances in opposition to the U.S., what this policy has essentially done is create an entire region of people who are keenly aware of the deleterious byproducts of U.S. foreign policy that favors expediency and instant gratification over long term stability, and who have been oppressed by a set of heavy handed dictators who's only real legitimacy comes in the form of U.S. weapons and diplomatic support (Sharma, 2013). These policies are where we find the roots of much of the anti-American sentiment we see in the Middle East today and the basis for how aggressive terror organizations are able to recruit and thrive (Sharma, 2013). Indeed these aggressive interventionist policies have had much broader effects even outside of the Middle East that many do not take in to consideration when thinking about the total cost of using these strategies.

In the following sections I will elaborate on these costs, which I have found to be centered around six main areas. First, degraded international opinion of the United States, especially in the Middle East, has created an environment which is generally opposed to U.S. interests and involvement, making it hard to achieve foreign policy objectives. Furthermore, aggressive U.S. security policies have become a source of provocation abroad, and are dysfunctional as they create enemies in the international community who then “soft balance U.S. interests. Credibility of U.S. actions and message abroad have also taken a hit, as many have largely come to view the United States as hypocritical, thus further hardening opposition to U.S.

interests. Furthermore, the economic cost of activist efforts in the Middle East has put a significant burden on U.S. taxpayers, who are now beginning to favor isolationist policies. In the long run this may limit U.S. ability to react to changing circumstances in the international community and miss opportunities to shore up power. Finally, U.S. indifference to growing allied complacency has further contributed to the U.S. financial burden and allowed it's allies to buck-pass the security of the western world onto the United States while at the same time criticizing the methods it uses to secure it. Following the discussion of these issues, suggestions will be given as to how the United States can adjust it's international presence to mitigate these shortcomings. Essentially, the argument will be given that the United States would benefit from a more passive and less involved policy that favors diplomatic efforts over active intervention.

The Costs and Burdens of Hard Power Politics

Dwindling Public Opinion and Soft Balancing

The first, and I would argue the most important cost of this strategy, considering the U.S.'s traditional role as a progressive world leader, is dwindling global support and opinion for the United States. For some time now, the United States has been seeing declines in global opinion due to a growing impression that the United States does not hold itself to the same rules it demands others follow. This is especially true when considering the global backlash from the War on Terror and Operation Iraqi Freedom specifically, where the United States has committed itself to a stateless war in which it carries out direct action strikes, often without host government permission, and among an otherwise civilian population. This kind of proactive U.S. policy has lead to inevitable concern from the global community. The general assumption has become that rather than using diplomatic processes to work with the international community to solve current

problems, the United States has used an “unnecessarily militaristic and forward leaning foreign policy” (Posen, 2013).

While there is good reason to believe that the collateral damage from these strikes is blown a bit out of proportion in the global media, arguably leading to exaggerated impressions of the human costs of these operations, the growing sentiment has clearly become that the United States is waging an illegal war on anyone it wants, outside of the rules of armed conflict. This sentiment is not only growing in the Middle East. Global opinion of U.S. international policies have dropped significantly across the board, with the strongest opposition being to the “drone” program, with no other country other than the United States approving of these actions (Pew, 2012). Indeed even public opinion in the United States is mixed at best with slightly over half of Americans approving of the program (Pew, 2012). Unfortunately, the United States is already experiencing significant pushback from this forward leaning foreign policy. Posen argues that since the 1990’s these policies have caused some actors to resort to “soft balancing”, a sort of low grade diplomatic opposition that uses the rules of international institutions, to oppose U.S. policy goals (2013). While Russia and China have so far been the principal advocates of this strategy and often team up to oppose U.S. interests out of mutual fear of U.S. power, this kind of activity can only be expected to expand if the United States doesn't evolve its strategy in a way that can use diplomacy rather than hard power to achieve its interests (Posen, 2013).

In fact, terrorism itself can also be seen as a type of balancing, motivated by negative sentiment towards the United States or other countries, and even towards cultures by which communities feel oppressed. While terrorism isn't seen by most security experts as a fundamental threat to U.S. society like the one posed by traditional balancing coalitions, it has certainly

proved to be a significant threat to many of our vital interests. U.S. counter-terror efforts have taken a significant toll on the U.S. debt and further degraded global opinion of the United States, thus arguably leading to more terrorist activity and positive sentiment toward the perpetrators of this sort of activity in limited circles abroad. Therefore, in the U.S. effort to counter a problem whose foundations are rooted in the negative opinion caused by forward leaning U.S. policies, the United States has used what many see as yet another overly aggressive policy to counter it, ultimately exacerbating the problem that it was trying to eradicate in the first place. It may be instinctual to counter aggression with aggression, but one must consider the more fundamental causes of the problem, and the long term effects of any strategy used in solving that problem.

Thus, in view of dwindling U.S. opinion, and soft balancing, it may be best to err on the side of caution and take the least aggressive measure to achieve one's goal. This is also a view shared by Barry Posen who suggests that an "undisciplined, expensive, and bloody strategy has done untold harm to U.S. national security" by "making enemies as fast as it slays them, discourage[ing] allies from paying for their own defense, and convince[ing] powerful states to band together to oppose Washington... further raising the costs of carrying out its foreign policy" (2013). Posen argues that the United States needs to consider a less traditional strategy such as retrenchment which would curtail the definition of vital U.S. interests.

Credibility gap and Lack of Legitimacy

Another cost of the current aggressive and interventionist U.S. policy, has been the serious degradation of U.S. legitimacy in the Islamic world and on the global stage. Decades of support for authoritarian dictators while at the same time acting as a beacon for democratic values and free society has created a serious credibility gap between the United States and the

people in the Middle East who have fallen victim to these hypocritical patterns of intervention. This may explain the lack of desire for U.S. assistance and involvement in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. As Kahl and Lynch put it in *U.S. Strategy After the Arab Uprisings: Towards Progressive Engagement* “newly empowered regional publics embittered by decades of experience with heavy-handed U.S. interference and support for dictatorships have little interest in a domineering style of American leadership” (2013). A “hands off” policy may yield some benefits in this region. However, it is important to understand that “hands off” doesn't amount to a complete severance of diplomatic relations or total regional withdrawal. Kahl and Lynch suggest that considering the context of the post Arab Spring, the potential for widespread popular mobilization and political instability in the Gulf has increased dramatically (2013). Therefore, it is important for the United States to diverge from its historical preference for intervention and support for the status quo, and essentially let things work themselves out while at the same time promoting meaningful political reforms diplomatically such as women’s rights, even though this message will be received with skepticism at first considering our history (Kahl and Lynch, 2013). This type of diplomacy would mostly amount to calls for reform and women’s rights on the international stage, letting actors in these states know that we will support legitimate moves towards democracy by advocating their position in international institutions, and creating economic incentives for political reform. The general goal of this strategy would be to try not to pick winners, but rather continually incentivize legitimate reform no matter what group it comes from. Over the long term, this sort of strategy could be what is needed to change the perception of the United States as an international actor that pursues policies in line with its progressive, liberal message.

Financial burden of Activism

An additional cost of this forward leaning, interventionist security strategy, especially in the Middle East, has been the significant financial burden that it puts on the U.S. government and taxpayer in relation to the value of U.S. interests that it claims to secure. Currently, U.S. military operations in the Persian Gulf alone consumes at least 15% of the U.S. defense budget, quite a significant amount for an operation that has done nothing but serve to undermine U.S. power, further entangle it in an area known for constant hostility, and secure a relatively small amount of oil for U.S. consumer markets; around 20% (Posen, 2013). Meanwhile, we have provided global allies with adequate security “insurance as to be able to steadily [cut their defense spending] and outsource their defense to Washington” (Posen, 2013). Europe as a whole has cut their defense spending by approximately 15% since the end of the Cold War and collectively spends only 1.6% of its GDP on defense (Posen, 2013). Additionally, Japan has only been able to manage around 1.0% of its GDP for defense spending, odd considering its wealth, as well as its history and close proximity to China (Posen, 2013). This is rather concerning when taking into account the deep defense partnerships and security assurances the United States provides to both of these regions abroad. This is not even considering the 4.6% of our GDP the United States spends on security, which has in the minds of many come to embody a sort of “welfare for the rich” seeing as the United States gets so little in return for its massive investment in global stability (Posen, 2013).

Allied Complacency

While critics argue that the United States has no difficulty affording this kind of defense spending, even on an indefinite timeline, and that the security assurance the United States

provides has underwrote the significant decline in large scale war since the end of WWII, its important that we question whether these sorts of agreements haven't undermined U.S. security at a more fundamental level. U.S. strength abroad, at least in the eyes of Americans, has mostly come from our soft power influence and the noble ideas of liberty that we promote. This can be seen in the America's perception of itself as an industrialist and a liberator, who despite their massive military capability would rather trade with nations abroad and only go to war to free the oppressed, and only when absolutely necessary. Unfortunately, America's definition of "absolutely necessary" has gotten wider, and in an age of instant mass communication our forward leaning policies have made impression management much more difficult to achieve. This can be seen in the ever more critical stories being released about the interventionist actions the United States carries out in it's effort to hold up this world order it feels it has a responsibility to maintain. These sorts of activities are not new, since the end of WWII the United States has always been active in global security and maintained clear boundaries around our allies interests. But only now, since the global war on terror, has this action come under such unified opposition from the allies whose interests we supposedly maintain. While the United States has been claiming to hold the line on the forefront of the western world, some if it's more comfortable allies have criticized the effort as overly militant and imperialist. All the while, these states are arguably able to enjoy the fruits of the heavy handed U.S. security efforts that they criticize. Thus, it may be time for our complacent and critical allies to make some difficult security decisions themselves and take more responsibility for their own security; even if the nature of this criticism is more of a civil than political opposition. Perhaps then more people will come to understand that the necessary choices in assuring one's own security are most often one between

bad and worse outcomes rather than between right and wrong; meanwhile the United States may be able to afford to resume more of its traditional role as the beacon of justice.

Declining Domestic Opinion of Foreign Intervention

Finally, a fatal flaw of an aggressive foreign policy that has arguably only recently become a factor for (post WWII) U.S. policy makers, is a declining *domestic* support for interventionist military action abroad. Nearly 50% of Americans feel the United States should retreat from world affairs (Hormats, 2014). This is a significant increase from years past and represents not only a growing sense of distrust or an impression of lack of direction in our leaders foreign policy compared to the ever growing issues abroad, but also shows a “sense of anxiety and frustration” with domestic issues that impact Americans day to day lives (Hormats, 2014). This frustration is leading more and more Americans to advocate for a policy of retrenchment and a retreat from an assertive stance in the international stage. While the costs of this new American outlook on foreign policy is mixed, one decidedly negative outcome of this new trend in the context of U.S. leadership, is that it will be much harder in the future for the U.S. government to get the American people on board when there is a real threat to U.S. security abroad. By defining their interests so narrowly, “overspending”, and “overselling” the necessity of international interests in the past, the United States has created a significant amount of distrust with its own constituency at home. In the near term this is could actually be beneficial on the security end, as it will motivate leaders to abandon the unnecessary and un-winnable wars in the Middle East. However, it could also be problematic in the long term when trying to justify any needed policy shifts that would deepen ties in a new area such as Asia, whether for economic purposes or otherwise.

Measured Retrenchment: Maintaining Core Interests Abroad, at Home

While the lessons of the Middle East have come with significant costs for the fundamental popularity and influence of the United States in broad terms, and have shown the need for a more measured foreign policy, it is important to understand that retrenchment does not, and should not, mean a withdrawal from the world (Posen, 2013). Given the modern world of globalized economics and security, advocating isolationism would be worthy of ridicule. Nevertheless, in order to know what and where our current interests are, it may first be best to understand what they are not, and which policies are outdated and dysfunctional. In this section I will spell out some of the broader traditional policies the United States has held on to for too long and need to be revamped to move forward with a coherent foreign policy.

First, I will start with a discussion of the United States's security policies in the context of securing oil in the Middle East and give evidence to suggest the invalidity of our security ties in the region for this purpose. I will then propose how a policy of offshore balancing may be the best way to ensure our allies security, as it allows the United States more flexibility in its policy choices. Then I will discuss the pros and cons of a progressive engagement policy and give my opinion as to how the United States might alter the framework proposed by Kahl and Lynch to better suit U.S. interests. Lastly I will make some suggestions for how the United States might go about closing some possible gaps in its security architecture that may arise from a more retrenched policy like the one that has been proposed.

Oil: Does the United States Need the Middle East?

The United States's first and primary reason for its historic military involvement in the Middle East has traditionally been to secure a stable source of energy. At least until 2001, even any discussion of security really just boiled down to ensuring regional stability in order to stabilize the price of this commodity. While it is true that just a handful of countries in the

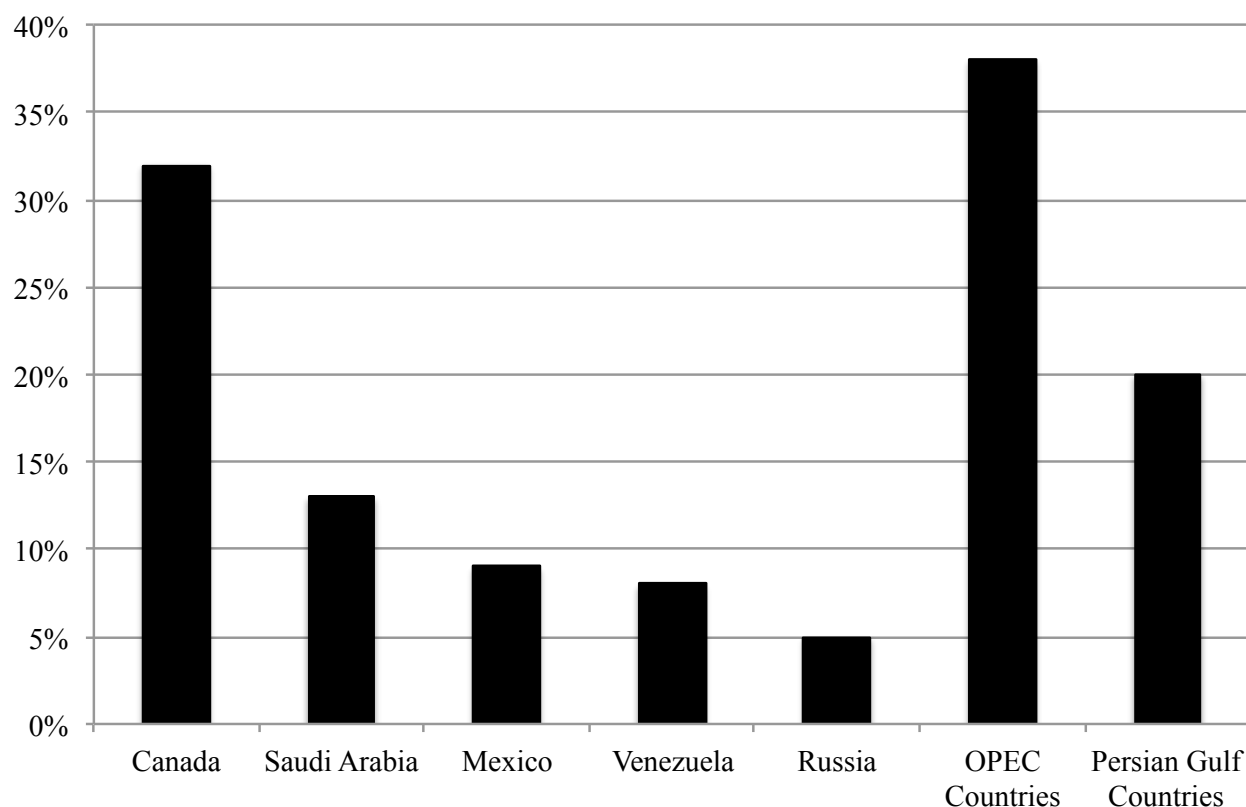


Figure 1. Top Sources of Gross U.S. Oil Imports by Country, in Percent of Total Consumption
 Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2015

Middle East account for nearly half of all currently known oil reserves across the globe and serve as a formidable force to be reckoned with in the energy market, this still does not justify the scale of U.S. intervention there. The United States has significant avenues for overcoming this challenge, and as evidence shows, has already been diversifying their energy providers and minimizing their reliance on Middle Eastern sources. As of 2013, the five largest sources of

imported petroleum to the United States were: Canada, Saudi Arabia, Mexico, Venezuela, and Russia (EIA, 2015). Furthermore, only 20% of total imports come from Persian Gulf countries, of which 13% is accounted for by Saudi Arabia, leaving only 7% of U.S. oil sources to other nations in this region (EIA, 2015). Furthermore, these numbers have had a downward trend since 2005; a trend which can be expected to continue considering rising demand and uncertainties posed by spreading conflict in the Middle East (EIA, 2015). Better yet, out of the five highest oil producers, three are countries located outside the Middle East with the United States ranking third above Iran and China (Tradequip, 2015). While the 20% of U.S. oil coming from Middle East sources is a seemingly large amount, one can hardly concede it justifies the massive U.S. effort to maintain regional security. This is especially so, considering the fact that the United States has sold Saudi Arabia the means to handle their own security, which would leave only 7% of our oil imports in the hands of weaker regimes as to justify U.S. military stability ties to the region. Also, given the argument that taking liberal military action may be counterproductive to fighting terrorist organizations, this really just leaves the oil as the only reason for ground force presence in the area, an amount of oil that can easily be filled by Canadian or domestic production.

Furthermore, measured retrenchment in addition to foreign policy that relies more heavily on diplomacy advocating for true democratic development in oil producing states, could lead to better relations with oil producing states in the long term if a regime change resulted from this kind of action. The United States, with its improved image, could then be in a good position to once again negotiate energy imports once democratic consolidation was complete. Some critics

may point to the current state of Iraq as a case against this kind of retrenchment and an example of why this policy is unworkable. However, I feel that the situation with ISIS in Iraq is still too early to call in the context of long term results. Over time, the violent behavior of ISIS will

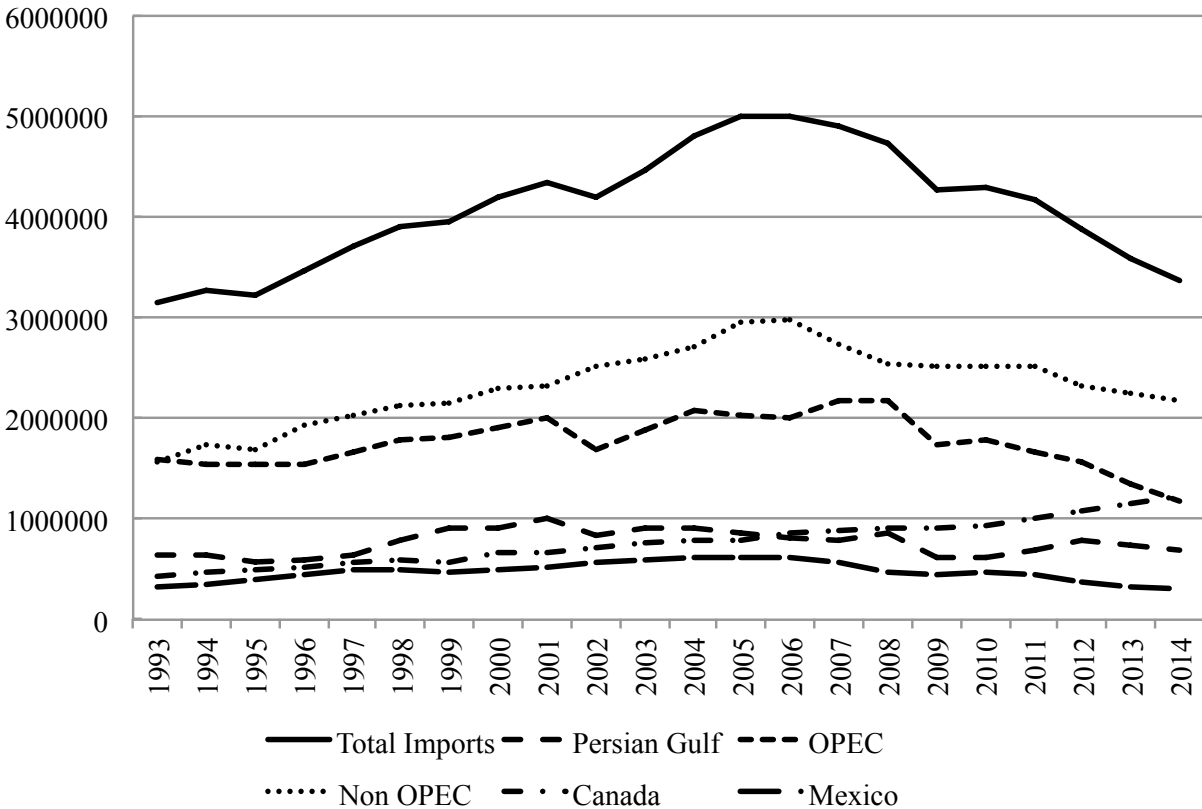


Figure 2. Sources of Gross U.S. Oil Imports Over Time in Thousands of Barrels Annually
 Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2015

alienate many supporters, who may then be able meet the challenge overcoming this threat. The question then will be whether Iraq and Syria will be able to make the turn towards democracy, or instead lean towards a new authoritarian leader. All of this is of course is a rather unlikely turn of events in the near term, but it does show the potential gains of being on the right side of history in the long run, which is an aspect of foreign policy that the United States could use more focus.

Off Shore Balancing: Do We Have to “Be There” to Be There?

Many critics have also argued that U.S. military presence in the Middle East is needed for ensuring allied security in the region such as Jordan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and of course Israel. While the “NATO model” suggests that a relatively large amount of ground forces need to be stationed around fault lines with allied regions in order to intervene at a moment’s notice, this is an outdated model that doesn't account for new innovations in American military tactics. This traditional “NATO model” strategy heavily discounts the evolving ability of the United States to rapidly mobilize and gain access to key foreign infrastructure when needed to station and deploy troops abroad, especially considering modern U.S. war strategies that have limited the use of ground forces, significantly reducing infrastructure needs that would necessitate permanent bases to run large scale operations. The United States has an unprecedented and unrivaled ability to project power abroad through the use of sea and air power, and to conduct special operations raids to achieve admittedly limited, yet crucial key objectives. A perfect instance of this capability was seen in the U.S. response to the earthquake in Port AuPrince, where the United States military was able to secure the international airport and conduct humanitarian aid operations only hours into the crisis. Another example is the Bin Laden Raid, which demonstrated an ability of U.S. SOCOM to conduct operations in denied territory. Together, these characteristics of modern U.S. military rapid deployment and use of small specialized units paints a picture of a force that can achieve it necessary objectives with minimal reliance on costly alliances with unsavory allies.

One could also argue that having large numbers of any kind of forces stationed over seas makes one more vulnerable, even if just by way of a wider surface area to attack; this is

especially true of ground forces as demonstrated by multiple incidents in Beirut and Riyadh. With this in mind, a shift to more of an off shore balancing strategy could limit this kind of vulnerability while still providing the necessary standing in the area to provide backstops when large scale conflict seems imminent to maintain stability, and protect any truly vital interests if needed.

This shift to more of an off shore balancer role does have its limits, as air power has so far proved limited in its ability to disrupt non-state actors from achieving objectives in places like Yemen, Somalia, Syria, and Iraq. However, major U.S. efforts to counter these types of terrorist (and in many cases the very same) organizations have also proven largely ineffective even in the long term. That is if one were to define Iraq and Afghanistan as a long term effort. More fundamental to the idea of off shore balancing in general though, is a significant narrowing of the concept of U.S. interests and strategic commitments as a means to conserve resources for the rare instances in which U.S. vital interests really are at stake, rather than going to war with actors whose threat presents a debatable case, such as Al Qaeda or ISIS (Kahl and Lynch, 2013). However, Kahl and Lynch suggest that pulling back too far could create a vacuum that would cause fearful and seemingly abandoned U.S. allies in the region to seek assurances outside of the traditional U.S. source and into the arms of Western adversaries (2013). They counter with an approach they call progressive engagement in which the United States would “first, encourage the emergence of strong, democratic partners, and second, “right sizing” the U.S. military footprint” in this region, a process which includes maintaining relations with and arming our current allies (Kahl and Lynch, 2013). While I agree with both steps of this strategy in the abstract and feel this is a step in the right direction, there are some aspects of the plan I feel

won't work and may be counterintuitive as they describe it because it still relies on compromised foreign relations for logistic support.

Progressive Engagement: Is It Progressive Enough?

On the point of promoting democratic reform, Kahl and Lynch are correct in their assertion that more democracy in the Middle East will likely to produce leaders less cooperative with U.S. interests, but these leaders will prove more effective and useful to the United States in terms of regional stability and legitimacy over the long run, which will also likely reduce terrorism (2013). A process which the United States should support (Kahl and Lynch, 2013). However, where I feel they go wrong is suggesting that the United States should at the same time continue the practice of selling offensive weapons to current regimes in exchange for guarantees in the way of democratization (Kahl and Lynch, 2013). Also, they suggest that the United States should adjust its economic and security relationships in the region to promote reform while not getting so involved as to pick winners in internal politics (Kahl and Lynch, 2013).

Unfortunately, these two activities are not conducive to obtaining any of the aspects of soft power we lack in the Middle East such as legitimacy and popularity. All too often, leaders who have received weaponry and support from the United States have turned those weapons on their own people which has proved harmful to U.S. popularity there. Also, policies using economic and security relationships to effect political change abroad often looks a lot like picking winners in the eyes of the citizens who live there, even when using methods short of sanctions. This plan will likely provoke additional distrust towards the United States, something that is already abundant. Any U.S. plan promoting meaningful and legitimate democratic reform

in the Middle East would have to do so with a “hands off” approach that would not lead people to suspect that the United States was determining the outcomes of such change. As we have seen in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, this approach may not be conducive to democratic consolidation or even stability in general, however the long term outcomes have not yet been determined and may still favor democratic actors in the long run. While some hawks may criticize this as a way to justify a passive stance on the human rights violations going on in these states, I fail to see any positive outcome of U.S. ground force intervention. I counter that a more retrenched stance in these areas allows the United States the room to speak out against these human rights and authoritarian regimes, due to a decreased reliance on them for military and political support. Evidence even suggests oppressed populations in the Middle East don't desire the kind of “help” that U.S. military intervention would provide. “Even in Syria, the worst case scenario outcome of the Arab Spring, polls as of 2014 indicate that Middle Eastern sentiment is still clearly against U.S. military intervention in this crisis, suggesting that “Arabs prefer the Arab world sorting out their own problems, rather than the United States solving” [them] (Walsh, 2014).

On the “right sizing” front I feel that Kahl and Lynch are essentially on point. Using Bahrain as an example, they suggest that while security cooperation buys the United States a certain amount of influence and leverage, current U.S. force posture has caused over-dependence on such relationships in certain instances which now undermine security strategy by creating “strategic exposure”, a situation where the United States is unable to make a needed policy shift due to a reliance on the current regime for the basing of its Fifth Fleet (Kahl and Lynch, 2013). Kahl and Lynch suggest that under a policy of progressive engagement, the United States would

avoid this sort of predicament by diversifying and reducing American military presence in the Middle East; although they fail to specify where the United States could station its forces while still being able to have a meaningful influence in this region (2013). I feel that a curtailed reliance on foreign infrastructure in this region would also allow the United States to speak out against oppressive regimes there and more fully personify its values, eventually undoing much damage done there. Kahl and Lynch say it best “the tolerance of unrepentant authoritarian regimes does little for the United States in the long term if it carries the seeds of an even greater regime-threatening crisis down the road.

While I agree with all the intentions and general concepts posed in the progressive engagement plan, I feel that their recommendation doesn't distance the United States enough from the current and unpopular sources of power in the Middle East region. Where Kahl and Lynch suggest trading weapons for democratic reform, I feel holding openly measured and cautious diplomatic relations is best, as it keeps us off the from appearing to be “on the side of the oppressor” and doesn't have the opportunity of backfiring. Also, I feel that off shore balancing is superior to progressive engagement in this context as it requires minimal reliance on actors with whom cooperation would undermine the larger message the United States has always sent as being an advocate for freedom and justice around the globe. However, I would also like to point out that the sort of cooperation that Kahl and Lynch recommend could be used to some effect in the right circumstances and if done with a measured hand in the amount of support training or economic incentives given. This is a point I will elaborate on further when discussing investment in the Asia-Pacific. In any case, the reality is that the United States does have vital interests it needs to secure abroad that will require a significant yet comparatively measured

investment to secure in the long term. On the positive side most of these interests (especially in the context of the Middle East) lie in what is commonly referred to as “The Commons”, an area where the United States has had a traditional and unprecedented advantage.

Defining New Global U.S. Interests: Securing the Commons

While many feel the commons is a largely undefined concept, the securing of which would constitute the micromanaging of every inch of the planet as well as the space around it, Scheinmann and Cohen argue otherwise and assert that what “Securing The Commons” really boils down to is “protecting maritime trade...in and around six strategic chokepoints, while also monitoring and mitigating the effects of natural disasters...on trans-Atlantic and trans-Pacific air traffic” (2012). Essentially, every square inch of the globe is not critical to U.S. objectives, and the security of any of these areas must be thought of in terms of vital interests, location, and threat (Scheinmann, Cohen, 2012). In the end, Scheinmann and Cohen suggest that maritime navigation is the only real commons area with any significance to securing vital U.S. interests abroad due to its heavy reliance on global trade, 90% of which is seaborne today (Scheinmann, Cohen, 2012).

Scheinmann and Cohen argue that major threats to global trade, whether by state or non-state actors can be condensed down into six maritime passages through which a large percentage of global trade must pass; three of which are in the Middle East (2012). The passages include: the Panama canal, the Suez Canal, the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Malacca, the Strait of Gibraltar, and the Bab el-Mandeb (Scheinmann, Cohen, 2012). While Scheinmann and Cohen argue that the greatest threat to these areas comes from both pirates and terrorists, I feel that this assertion discounts the fact that unlike state actors who often have real military assets and can

cause a complete closure of any one of these straits, terrorists don't have the necessary means to totally cut off a whole merchant shipping lane and are really only able to marginally increase the cost of doing business using a given route. In any case, the United States has the benefit of being in a prime position to be the arbiter of security in these cases, given its hegemonic naval power. This naval defense of common shipping lanes also fits well with the off shore balancer role that was elaborated on above, by increasing and relying on a supreme U.S. naval power, the United States can unilaterally and indefinitely impose regional order when it needs to. However, in contrast to how the United States has gone about this in the past, by relying of naval power rather than a ground force, the United States can operate from the commons and avoid the traditional compromise needed to support its presence in the area, compromise both in morals and ties to authoritarian regimes.

Filling the Gaps in the New U.S. Defense Posture

However, in the context of large scale withdrawal and retreat to “hands off” engagement with the Middle East, many may ask questions of whether this strategy compromises U.S. domestic security. While this is possible, as a lighter hand in this region could relieve significant pressure on terror organizations now operating in this area, I feel the United States can modify its military and intelligence communities in ways that could make it more successful in disrupting terrorist activity while still projecting a larger footprint abroad.

I would like to again iterate that having a strategy of traditional and numerous ground forces deployed abroad has not translated into less terrorism, it has in fact legitimized much of the extremist message and served to assist recruitment efforts. However, this does not negate the fact that serious action often needs to be taken in instances which we have tangible and reliable

intelligence, as well as the means to manifest a positive outcome. What we really need to understand is what intelligence do we need, how do we best acquire that intelligence, what is the threshold for intervention, and what is the best way to carry out that direct action abroad. Establishing clear lines in these areas would help the United States “clean up” and streamline its foreign policy as to only intervene when absolutely necessary, and not get dragged into endless unconventional wars where minimal interests are at stake. None of these questions are easy, and have been debated a length by generations of security experts, but for our purposes here I wish to simply give some broad suggestions and critiques of the U.S. defense structure that I feel would be conducive to long term security while using a light footprint.

Serious domestic security threats to the United States in the Middle East today all come from non traditional actors and in some cases the cooperation between these and traditional state actors. The intelligence needed to disrupt these types of organizations has undoubtedly proven to be human intelligence, this is due to the small size, signature, and technological reliance of these groups. What makes human intelligence so valuable, as opposed to traditional sources such as imagery and signals, is that human intelligence conveys intentions, plans, and attitudes; all of which are preclusive to prediction, the ultimate goal of intelligence in the first place. Admittedly, the United States is at a serious disadvantage when it comes to obtaining human intelligence in this area from actors such as those who mostly comprise terror organizations; culturally contrastive individuals, unmotivated by western conceptions of “freedom” and monetary gain. This is a serious area in which the Central Intelligence Agency and Department of Defense intelligence services need to gain capability. By recruiting more Americans of Middle Eastern backgrounds who possess the language skills, as well as blend in better with the areas they need

to operate in, the United States may at least have a basis for a broader human intelligence activity in critical areas. More importantly, the United States must have outlets in place for would be defectors to be able to contact and cooperate with the United States abroad. As Milton Bearden points out, since catching our own potential turncoat is unlikely, “you need places outside of U.S. embassies, often with their triple security cordons, for the people who decide I hate this, I want to get out” (Newsweek, 2014).

Expanding this small footprint human intelligence capability like the ones needed in modern conflicts, may mean giving the CIA more autonomy and independence of action in the way it carries out its operations. While many people are distrusting of the CIA for its plentiful misconduct in the past, we have to understand that intelligence is an inherently dirty, high stakes business that needs to be afforded the ability to work outside the boundaries of what most Americans are comfortable with; areas like interrogation and assassination. Of course on the other hand, some oversight is obviously necessary and goals generally need to be countered with morals and civil rights. Finding the right compromise in both of these areas in a way that allows innovation and freedom of maneuver of U.S. intelligence officers is the best strategy for closing any gaps in U.S. security that might arise in the wake of a more restrained global posture.

The United States has also shown progress in its ability to assert its security interests while keeping a small footprint in its massive expansion of both the size and capabilities of its special operations forces. These forces are capable of achieving limited yet critical U.S. defense goals by conducting a number of specialized operations in denied territory abroad. Whether it be hostage rescue, oil field seizure, seizure of maritime vessels, capture or assassination of key terrorist leadership, or counter proliferation and nuclear materials security, U.S. investment in

these kinds of forces have translated into a robust ability to rapidly deploy and achieve relatively limited objectives of vital interest to U.S. security when the risk necessitates such action. A further advantage is that these forces are almost universally interoperable and are adept at launching operations from seaborne vehicles, which is complementary to a offshore balancing approach. This capability will continue to be a solid investment in the context of a security strategy that limits ground intervention yet still needs to be able to act to rapidly project power when needed.

Facing Harsh Realities: Security is Never Certain

In closing of the Issue of U.S. drawback in the Middle East, one issue concerning defense that many Americans have been hesitant to accept is that security is never certain, that is to say there is always some risk. To meet every challenge to U.S. security and completely eradicate them at any cost is not rational in such a globalized and interconnected system such as ours. There will always be threats to global security, and unfortunately some threats will always break through. While a noble goal, one hundred percent success is unachievable and we need to admit that an effort to secure absolute security at any cost is counter productive. It has eroded much of the fundamental diplomatic advantage we once had as the beacon of international justice and peace. We must also realize that terrorism and radical Islam may be self defeating. If we admit that our intervention has backfired and stimulated more anti-American sentiment, then the absence of American military action may delegitimize the terror groups causing the people that they oppress to find the means to secure their own interests. What we must understand is that it is our responsibility to then accept the result of self determination and play with the actors we are

given, while still staying true to our values and backing up our noble words of freedom and liberty with equally noble actions.

Fortunately, if the United States follows the above recommendations for drawing down in the Middle East, things will probably work themselves out given enough time and may eventually open the door for a new kind of large scale U.S. involvement in the region, hopefully centered around fair trade and institutional involvement. However, while the Middle East may need this time to heal from misfortunes of flawed U.S. intervention, a new region is rising to prominence and presents an opportunity for the United States to invest and practice a new foreign policy model that favors compromise and discourse, for long term stability and mutual economic gains. In the section that follows, I will discuss the opportunities that the Asia-Pacific offers as well as how the United States should go about staking its claim as to stay on top in a world of shifting power.

Pivoting to Asia: A New Era of U.S. Involvement

In November of 2011, then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton published an article in *Foreign Affairs* articulating the Obama administration's plan to "pivot" to Asia. This plan was based on the notion that the massive drain of U.S. spending and diplomatic efforts, embodied in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, were coming to a close, and thus afforded the United States the energy to pursue more promising prospects outside of the Middle East. Clinton states that "in the next 10 years, [America] need[s] to be smart about where we invest time and energy, so that we put ourselves in the best position to sustain our leadership, secure our interests, and expand our values" (2011). She concludes by proposing that this investment is best spent in the Asia-Pacific region, and suggests that this region is soon likely to become the center of the new global

economy (Clinton, 2011). To many, these statements seem odd at a time when so much crisis and conflict are presenting themselves elsewhere, that seems to require our immediate attention.

Thus, rhetoric about expanding our economic goals, pushing our values, and showing leadership anywhere but the Middle East seems less important by comparison. I argue however, that Asia is exactly where the United States should be going in the coming years, as the rise of China and the expanding markets of the Asia-Pacific present the United States with the opportunity to counter it's marginal decline in status and power following a decade of unproductive hard power politics in the Middle East.

The Pull of Commerce

With Russia resurgent and the Middle East ablaze, what is it about Asia that warrants such a massive pull on the United States? To the economist, rather than the security analyst, these answers are self evident. The Asia-Pacific region is home to over half the world's population, the world's second and third top economies (top three if counting the U.S.), and top seven of the world's largest armies (Campbell, Ratner, 2014). Furthermore, the Asia-Pacific is soon expected to solely account for over half the world's GDP, and is currently the second biggest destination for U.S. exports, only rivaled by the North American Free Trade Agreement region (Campbell and Ratner, 2014, Manyin et al. 2012). Also, security threats abound with China's rising economic and military power and Asia being home to the worlds largest Muslim nation Indonesia, which is located in a region in which fundamentalist groups are on the rise and quickly becoming a serious concern (Bond, Simmons, 2009). So to re-iterate Secretary Clinton's argument, it is indeed *very* likely these new and rapidly expanding markets will be at the center of global trade for the foreseeable future, and will present greater opportunities for U.S. exports

and investment than our current focus in the Middle East. Furthermore, having a hand in these emerging markets will likely be the best way to shore up U.S. economic power and situate ourselves in the best position to have a leading influence in the future global order in which the Asia-Pacific region will be at the center.

Of course, behind any talk of securing our interests in Asia, is the fear of a rising China. With both strong cultural and historical ties, as well as a geographical advantage over the United States in the region, many have come to fear that in order to secure their own power, China will likely undercut or block any efforts to expand U.S. influence in the area. Chinese influence may come to dominate the Asia-Pacific without strong U.S. engagement in the region. Manyin et al. puts it best stating, “a failure to [give more emphasis to the Asia-Pacific] could invite other regional powers, particularly China, to shape the region in ways that are not necessarily in U.S. interests...indeed, many would argue that the potential costs of *inaction* arguably could outweigh the risks of action” (2012). Thus, the rise of China has come to represent much of the U.S. motivation to shift to this region, as well as a fear of possibly getting shut out. So far this situation has demonstrated how potential conflict is likely to result from any move that either the United States or China takes in obtaining a stake in this emerging center of power. Both parties seem to be acting under the assumption of zero sum politics, moves by both sides have so far been perceived as adverse the other, thus entangling both states in the classic security dilemma. Therefore, any plan for stability and peace in a U.S. pivot and Chinese rise must convince both sides that this competition is not a zero sum game; which will obviously be difficult. However, as I will articulate, there are certain steps the United States can take in it’s shift to Asia that will minimize tension while still achieving its objectives in the region.

What Has the Pivot to Asia Looked Like so Far

In pursuing this policy, the Obama Administration has been somewhat vague and incoherent on the mechanics of how it intends to manifest this policy in concrete terms. In Clinton's 2011 article, which serves as the first official articulation of the strategy, she attempts to spell out what she describes as "forward-deployed" diplomacy and "continuing to dispatch the full range of diplomatic assets...to every corner of the Asia-Pacific", primarily focused on six key areas (Clinton, 2011). These include: "strengthening bilateral security alliances, deepening our working relationships with emerging powers", "engaging with regional multilateral institutions, expanding trade and investment, forging a broad-based military presence, and advancing democracy and human rights" (Clinton, 2011). That the overall goal of this effort is to create a "web of partnerships and institutions" that will reflect those that have been built between the United States and Europe (Clinton, 2011). Clinton goes on to state that the United States is making significant strides in building these relationships in the way of participating in multilateral institutions such as ASEAN, promoting discourse with China over fair trade rules and investment, and establishing regional security by deploying littoral combat ships to Singapore (Clinton, 2011). Last, Clinton emphasizes the importance of reaching an agreement on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a free trade agreement linking the Asia-Pacific to the United States and South America and essentially putting the United States at the center of three different continents with new and expanding markets for U.S. exports. While the overall attempt is made to give more emphasis to soft power and the need to participate in multilateral institutions, the average observer can detect that Clinton continually pushes the need for increased U.S. military presence as a means to support the "peace and stability" of the region and ensure commercial

shipping traffic as a means of demonstrating commitment to regional allies. This assertive theme leaves some room to question whether this strategy really is a legitimate turn to soft power, or a hard power move intended to hedge a powerful and growing China. It is these implications for Chinese government that present the most serious obstacles and difficulties for U.S. leaders in any plan for a turn to the Asia-Pacific.

In the time since the pivot's introduction, the Obama administration has taken some considerable measures that may give clues as to the real substance of this policy shift. Aside from the numerous trips and meetings that both the president and secretary of state have had with Asian leaders, the administration has worked hard on securing the TPP deal, adding to the prospects, Mexico and Canada (among others) (Lieberthal, 2011). The United States has also joined the East Asian Summit demonstrating a significant effort to participate in multilateral institutions, pushed maritime security in an effort to strengthen ties between South East Asian leaders, and vowed to Asia-Pacific leaders that any of the anticipated defense spending cutbacks will not affect Asian security spending (Lieberthal, 2011). Furthermore, the United States has secured a free trade agreement with South Korea, reflective of the larger effort to push through the TPP deal, and authorized the rotational deployment of 2,500 Marines to Darwin Australia as an effort to boost troop numbers in the region (Lieberthal, 2011). But what I see as an even more significant change in U.S. policy, is the opening up of discourse with Myanmar, as shown in a 2011 trip by then Secretary of State Clinton, and later trips by President Obama, which really breaks new ground in the area (Lieberthal, 2011).

Despite this progress in the way of engagement, the more significant of these efforts and spending seem to be centered around expanding military presence and securing the TPP which is

largely perceived by China to be an economic bloc or another human rights push meant to constrain its rise, due to the stringent rules for TPP membership (Yuan, 2012). These moves miss the mark when stacked against the initial goals and intent of the pivot, which called for soft power and engagement with leaders in the area, rather than the traditional security oriented strategy that we have seen. I feel these, and any other similar actions, should be re-evaluated considering that the success of any U.S. plan in the area will need, or at the very least benefit from, China's complicity and cooperation. This is both due to their dominance in the area and the fundamental interconnectedness of their economy with others in the region. Present tensions illustrate how our overly assertive efforts have effectively discouraged China from welcoming our presence in the region, causing suspicion, and proved to be counterproductive to any U.S. objectives in the area.

China's Perspective

Despite an arguably superficial expressed U.S. desire for dialogue and negotiation, China has continually proven itself to be an impediment to U.S. goals, manifested in their increasingly belligerent behavior over territorial claims and vehement assertion of their interests in the region; particularly in the East and South China Seas. But why is China so threatened by our newfound interest in the region? After all, shouldn't China see engagement on issues of mutual interest such as the economy and regional security as a validation of their new prominence? Much of what I have already discussed, such as the expansion of U.S. military presence in the area is to blame for this. However, more analysis of the Chinese perspective is needed in order to fully understand their position and thus determine a more logical course of action that can secure U.S.

interests by easing tension and fostering the agreeable relationship needed for a mutual acquiescence of each players interest.

In his article “The Problem with the Pivot” Robert Ross argues that rather than China’s belligerence being a realist assertion of their increasing power, as many U.S. leaders have come to assume, China’s actions actually come from a place of insecurity over a growing inability to justify their rule through financial means in the face of a new economic uncertainty (Ross, 2012). Rather than being the rock solid economic powerhouse that the world imagines, Ross suggests that Chinese leaders panicked back in 2008 when they saw rising unemployment, increased inflation, and inequality, all of which the Chinese government saw as weakening the fundamental justification of their rule, financial prosperity (2012). To assure their hold on the population, Chinese leadership sought to appeal to nationalistic sentiment that had been on the rise in the last 20 or so years (Ross, 2012). Using this strategy, the Chinese government began to assert itself internationally and confront other states in the region over fisheries and mineral claims. It is this reliance on nationalistic rhetoric, coupled with a fear of U.S. intervention in the region during a time of financial crisis, that has caused China to “act out” and push back against U.S. interests (Ross, 2012). But then again, who could blame them? During this time, the United States committed to increase its troop levels in South Korea, based littoral combat ships in Singapore, and strengthened defense cooperation with Japan and the Philippines (Ross, 2012).

Furthermore, one must consider that the United States is ever-present in every one of China’s major interest areas, from Taiwan, to military support of China’s neighbors, to constant human rights pressure (Nathan, Scobell, 2012). To the Chinese, these all represent blatant, public, and unnecessary challenges; especially considering the cultural value the Chinese place

on projecting strength and saving face. Never mind that the United States has contributed substantially to China's success in the way of access to markets, capital, and technology, solid policies and behaviors are what seem to most affect Chinese strategic thinking rather than simple gestures of good will; which China has proved to be soon forgotten or interpreted in terms of zero sum politics (Nathan, Scobell, 2012). This is of course followed up with contradictory domestic rhetoric in the United States that seeks to at the same time assure China that our goals are benign while also assuring the U.S. public that we will never let China's rise threaten U.S. interests (Nathan, Scobell, 2012).

It is primarily these expansionist approaches and rhetoric that may cost the United States more than it gains when it comes to having influence in Asia and feed into a security dilemma with China. Thus, any hard assertion of U.S. power in China's back yard is likely to bolster negative Chinese sentiment against the United States, become a self fulfilling prophecy by feeding China's already healthy paranoia. This would be counter productive at best, not really working towards U.S. goals. One should be reminded that U.S. goals concerning China are more three dimensional than one might assume. China has a special relationship with both North Korea and Iran, a relationship that the United States has relied upon and had success with in the past when trying to achieve objectives concerning with these difficult actors (Ross, 2012). A large scale falling out with China could have further implications in the context of these rouge states and jeopardize U.S. interests in areas outside of the Asian region. This is of course assuming U.S. motivations are indeed economic and altruistic rather than simply a realist move to ensure it's supremacy and checking the only real challenge to U.S. power in the last 25 years.

What Have We Done Right So Far

From the above arguments, we can see that any rebalancing effort to focus our attention on the Asia-Pacific and China needs to be done in a way that will ease tension and encourage true engagement between the United States, China, and its neighbors in a non-confrontational manner. All sides (mostly the U.S. and China) will need to be convinced that they will be able to pursue their interests with minimal interference by the other and that any gains on one side won't adversely affect the other. I feel the reduction of this zero sum consensus by these actors can be derived from the mutual understanding that both sides (U.S. and China) are highly interconnected to the point where success on one side really does directly result in tangible benefits for the other. Crossin gives evidence to this by stating “In reality, China and America need one another in the debt market, whether mainland economic policymakers like it or not... Chinese growth and stability depends on the U.S.—the biggest consumer market in the world—to continue its export-driven growth...[therefore] neither side will allow...disputes to derail this relationship” (2010).

The other side of this of course is that the United States needs China for its cheap exports that sustain much of the consumer market. I conclude this mutual need and interconnectedness of one another can be the foundation for much needed engagement and openness between the United States and China. Furthermore, I will lay out some aspects of the pivot that have already been beneficial as well as ones that can be improved helping establish a more coherent and productive environment for Sino-American, more accommodating to the achievement of U.S. goals. Essentially this alternative approach will require the United States to radically reshape its military posture, find a way to engage with less than ideal actors in the region, possibly by exchanging our financial benefits for human rights, and seriously invest in

soft power strategies such as education and disaster relief. These measures will de-escalate Chinese-American tensions and afford the U.S. legitimacy of influence in the region by way of our new found goodwill with Asia-Pacific countries and a less aggressive relationship with China.

First, to confirm the right steps the United States has taken thus far in pursuing this policy. The Obama administration's pursuit of reaching the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement has definitely been a step in the right direction. The passing of the TPP would serve four primary goals in the context of U.S. interests. "First, the TPP would create a more modern and comprehensive template for economic partnerships involving the United States," covering issues left unaddressed by past agreements that often "involve sectors where the United States has comparative advantage" (Petri et al., 2011). Additionally, passing the TPP would prevent the United States from being blocked out of the up and coming Asia-Pacific by the myriad of Chinese alternatives that are in the works (Petri, 2011). The TPP is also a positive move for the United States as it would have a broader effect on more economies than the more narrow agreements posed by its own alternatives (Petri, 2011). The TPP would consolidate over 14 bilateral trade agreements among countries now involved in TPP negotiations, greatly reducing overlapping rules and regulations, which complicate trade in the area. The TPP would serve to level the playing field for U.S. exports in Asia, considering many free trade agreements in ASEAN presently exclude the United States (Petri, 2011). All these benefits would give the U.S. economy a significant boost in this emerging market and foster closer relations with governments in the region, especially China, with whom a closer relationship could provide a regular forum for discourse, increasing trust.

However, China's alternatives to U.S. economic agreements could seriously complicate U.S. efforts to pass these measures. As of early 2012 China had passed 10 bilateral and multilateral free trade agreements, many members of which are currently in TPP negotiations (Song, Yuan, 2012). This has been in an attempt to sway members out of the TPP which China sees as a U.S. effort to constrain their economic rise, as well as play nice with its ASEAN neighbors who have been apprehensive about China's rise (Song, Yuan, 2012). Despite these efforts to assert their interests and check U.S. involvement in the region, I feel China has serious reason to consider joining the TPP rather than offering its own alternatives, even despite the environmental and human rights measures it would require. I argue getting into the TPP would benefit China by allowing them to bargain with the United States and possibly influence many of the terms of the agreement in a way that would benefit their position, especially if they get in early (Song, Yuan, 2012). Furthermore, the investment required to improve China's labor and environmental standards as a means of getting into the TPP would most likely pay off in the long run and support more long term economic development (Song, Yuan, 2012). However, even if China does want to join, it still needs approval from all current TPP member countries, a decision in which the United States is in a very good position to influence. If done properly, I feel that the United States could use this as a means for compromise and cooperation, leveraging its influence in the TPP to create a meaningful path for China's membership, in exchange for toned down aggression in the region and more negotiated human rights assurances which would benefit the region overall. This strategy would bring China into the fold by showing a willingness by the United States to make serious concessions and compromise. Rather than the current strategy, which seems to be using the TPP to further isolate China, thus feeding the perception of staking

out claims in the region, the United States needs to use the TPP to foster interconnectedness and reduce zero sum perceptions. This seems to be a more rational alternative providing for cooperation, rather than pushing the situation into a standoff where each side is trying to lure actors into their camp.

Another place where I think the current pivot policy has done well is in the opening up of relations with some of the traditionally less savory regimes in the region such as Myanmar. In opening up negotiations and discourse with countries such as these the United States buys itself a certain amount of influence in a government's decision making processes. Of course the difficulty and concern in this sort of relationship is trying to support development, while at the same time trying not to assist or condone any of the negative behaviors of an authoritarian regime. But I would still argue that there are certain trade offs in working with regimes, in this context, that should be considered and could go a long way to promote U.S. interests in the area.

Before explaining the benefits of U.S. cooperation with unsavory actors in the Asia-Pacific, I would like to take a moment to address some of the contradictions that might arise from this argument given my suggestion in the first section that this sort of action is counterproductive to U.S. interests in the Middle East. The primary difference in context between these two regions lies in the current trends of public perception towards U.S. involvement. While past wounds from past U.S. involvement have had some time to heal and industrialization trends in Asia now largely favor western culture, the current trend towards islamism in the Middle East have created widespread sentiment that western cultural and political diffusion is going to overwhelm traditional Islamic/Middle Eastern culture. This, along with past U.S. mistakes in intervention have created a highly protectionist culture. A key

difference also lies in the massive labor market that the Asia-Pacific presents as opposed to the highly technical and non labor-centric oil market of the Middle East. By gaining a footing and investing in the Asia-Pacific the labor market of this area will have broad benefits for the population at large, leading to better perceptions of U.S. involvement. The oil market of the Middle East has not not been able to capitalize on this benefit as oil production doesn't lend itself to such broad wealth distribution.

Furthermore, while U.S. compromise with authoritarian governments in the past has favored cheap trades such as money or weapons for resources, the kind of compromise I suggest would have the U.S. trade economic development (which is mutually beneficial), or security cooperation, and humanitarian aid in states such as Myanmar and Viet Nam in exchange for influence, political freedoms, and of course some resources. The benefit of this sort of exchange is that it allows the United States to buy influence with nefarious actors in a way that can be cut off immediately if needed and allow these actors to so easily turn U.S. help against their own citizens. The key in any agreement like this will be to make sure to use the levers when necessary to maybe not choose leaders or actions, but to support positive behavior. Aside from these apparent contradictions in my suggestions as to how the U.S. should treat nefarious actors in these regions, I feel that benefits can be numerous and should be considered

First, by giving a certain amount of legitimacy to otherwise neglected authoritarian states is more likely to have a moderating effect on these governments. Essentially, by giving them something to lose in the way of trade or international prominence, the United States can exert a certain amount of influence and curtail some key negative behaviors; certainly more so than if we had no relations at all. However, another down side is that there may be an expectation by the

regime in the eventuality of a coup, that we continue to support their rule. This can be seen in the cases of some governments that we have supported in the past, such as Iran. I feel that much of these sort of concerns can be remedied by the United States working out an exchange with these governments that trades economic incentives and aid for human rights and political freedoms. This sort of “freedom centric exchange” arrangement is an aspect of these relationships that has not been focused on in the past such as the United States’s interventions in the Middle East where the United States was prone to look the other way on human rights, so long as the government supported U.S. economic interests. In general, I feel that the United States can and should engage in limited and growing trade with unsavory actors while pushing their human rights agenda. The key to any plan along these lines will be for the United States to make the exchange worth it for on the financial end as to create proper leverage; something that I feel the United States has a natural advantage

Second, as we slowly empower these countries with economic security and development projects, the prospects for government moderation increase, and at the very least the quality of life improves for the population. However, these measures cannot, and probably should not, solely rely on U.S. efforts. The United States will need to work in cooperation with multilateral institutions such as the U.N. and World Bank to assure broader success and diversified stability for these developing nations rather than a complete reliance on U.S. assistance and trade. The overarching goal, is to slowly support democratic processes in these countries by heavily incentivizing political freedoms and human rights protections so that any eventual turning over of the government is relatively benign. This sort of strategy, if expanded upon and used properly, (which it has not been in the past) could go a long way to achieve wide spread soft power gains

and represents a sound future investment for U.S. popular opinion the region. These gains that will be generated by our leadership and commitment to these efforts and can be capitalized on later in the form of broad based cooperation motivated by our mutual interest and shared values, much like Western Europe in the years following WWII.

What More Should We Do

From the lessons of the Middle East and the increasing belligerence from China that has been a result of hard power politics, I feel it is safe to say that soft power is the way to proceed in securing our interests in the Asia-Pacific. While positive steps have been taken thus far, such as the TPP and diplomatic efforts with less traditional actors, more needs to be done if the consensus really is that the history of the future will be written in the Asia-Pacific. The U.S. military posture in this region particularly stands out as an issue to be remedied. When it comes to the Asian littorals, the U.S. military is not oriented in a manner that is conducive to the sort of soft power strategy we need in this region and needs to undergo serious modification if the United States is to position itself in a way that will de-escalate the tension between itself and China. Here I will elaborate on what those sweeping changes should look like and why they would go a long way to support and capitalize on the unique capabilities of the U.S. military.

The first goal in changing U.S. military posture in the region should be to relieve some pressure with China and give them a serious reason to believe that the United States isn't trying to encircle them in the way that our current deployment posture suggests. This would mean decreasing numbers in Korea, and drastically drawing down if not completely leaving Japan. This particular move would have the secondary benefit of easing some diplomatic tension there as well, due to Japan's continued frustration at our massive presence there. The differentiation in

strategies taken in these two countries is due to the more serious implications that withdrawal from Korea would have, considering the un-rational behaviors of the North Korean regime and South Korea's vulnerability to sudden attack. This stands as an area where I feel that a U.S. presence still serves as a valid deterrent to a particularly aggressive regime, who hasn't always acted in a rational fashion. Lastly, this would also require the Navy pulling out of all stations in the region with the exception of Australia. I feel the removal of the permanent U.S. presence from stations with close proximity to China will be viewed by China as a considerable concession to their position in the region and buy the United States a sizable amount of good will to negotiate elsewhere on issues more conducive to cooperation. Perhaps even leveraging their special relationship with North Korea to help assure South Korean security in the wake of our drawdown.

Of course abandoning our current allies in the region would also be a step in the wrong direction. U.S. security has worked in the region and I feel should be continued. That is why the reduction of U.S. troop concentrations near the Chinese mainland will need to be contingent upon the opening or expansion of the U.S. military base in Darwin Australia, where the United States could centralize its forces in the area and project power outward as an offshore balancer when needed for regional security concerns. This location would capitalize on the similar culture, values, and goals we share with Australia and essentially serve as a hub for multinational and American military involvement, cooperation, and influence in the region, while still keeping a significant physical distance away from China, reducing tension. Also, this location on the Northern Coast of Australia is ideal to serve the needs of the multiple armed services that would be located there, as well as being a prime spot on the Southern edge of South East Asia, still

close enough to rapidly respond to trouble when needed. Furthermore, this singular location provides serious cost savings in a time of needed budget cuts, capitalizing on economies of size, rather than the current model of several small locations which increases the amount of support personnel needed to meet the same goals.

Military Restructuring Conducive to Soft power

A primary goal of this altered and re-prioritized U.S. military involvement in the Asia-Pacific would be to open up a regional forum to focus on multinational joint training exercises with the aim of increasing multinational familiarity and logistical inter-operability in emergency disaster relief efforts (such as tsunami and typhoon response) and also to help these emerging powers develop their own capabilities along these lines. While multinational military cooperation with the United States can be expected to aggravate the Chinese government, who will most likely view these as yet another challenge to their power, I suggest these exercises should be done in tandem with a considerable diplomatic effort to help relieve any fears China may have, and also as an effort to encourage their participation. I feel that the significant gains made by giving China breathing room in the context of our permanent troop positions will buy us considerable complacency on their part in enacting the plan. Additionally, leading by example in this area and demonstrating to China the tangible benefits of military cooperation and disaster relief efforts, may actually encourage their genuine participation and an eventual change of strategy on their part to work along these same lines, ultimately reducing conflict in the region. By working to focus on its unique advantages, in this case military capabilities, disaster relief efforts, and values, the United States could seriously benefit from a relatively small investment

and actually use hard power assets and infrastructure to make soft power gains, while still keeping a rapidly deployable security force in the area.

Another, and probably more controversial, goal of U.S. military presence in the region would be to continue to develop allied conventional military capabilities and interoperability. This of course would not be a blanket service offered to all governments mentioned previously, namely those who do not meet certain human rights and democratic expectations that would be required of any assistance the United States provided. Much of this work would also have a reciprocal intelligence benefit for the U.S. military and intelligence services, as the suggested withdrawal from various current stations may deteriorate our ability to train and maintain intelligence partnerships and familiarity concerning any particular problems in these nations. These are specific advantages which only a persistent military partnership can provide. Bond and Simmons give concrete evidence of how this type of military cooperation can also work to build soft power in these areas which achieves hard power goals by pointing out a case in which U.S. Special Forces, in cooperation with the Filipino Army, were able to deteriorate the appeal of Abu Sayaf by using civic action programs (Bond, Simmons, 2009).

Ironically, an instance of this sort of multinational effort has already taken place between Australia, China, and the United States which I feel says a lot about the feasibility of this sort of plan. In Oct 2014, 30 soldiers (ten from each country) participated in Exercise Kowari 14, which took place in the Northern Australian wilderness with the intent to focus on survival skills training (Keck, 2014). While the author was rather critical in his article claiming that the underwhelming scale and the difficulty of organizing this event showed serious reason to doubt the legitimacy of the cooperation between the United States and China, I feel that the just the

opposite is true (Keck, 2014). While this exercise was a difficult compromise from both sides and left something to be desired in the way of scale, it does show that the United States and China, at the very least, want to be perceived as allies and understand that a good working relationship is essential to their goals. Also, the location and focus of this exercise goes a long way to prove the legitimacy of the framework of the concept mentioned previously. By focusing on minimally threatening aspects of military operations such as military operation other than war, survival training, disaster relief, and logistical interoperability, much of the uncertainty and suspicion can be reduced between the United States and China. This could possibly even have a significant impact in the long term by teaching China the virtues of soft power. By involving China in disaster relief efforts, China may come to understand the material objectives it can achieve with its neighbors in the Asia-Pacific, who it needs for export markets yet have been suspicious of its rise and subsequent aggression.

Much of this reshaping of the force distribution is prefaced off of the idea that modern U.S. military capabilities don't necessitate the strategic distribution of several positions in order to be effective. Modern U.S. forces are highly mobile and rapidly deployable with the ability to quickly respond to crisis anywhere in the world. This is not to mention the abilities of the American military to quickly seize and utilize territory, or the possibility of U.S. diplomatic efforts to pre arrange agreements to utilize runways or military infrastructure in times of need. In this way, the U.S. military no longer requires the sort of post WWII strategic distribution arrangement in order to project power. I would argue rather that current U.S. capabilities and structure benefit from a centralized location with unified command and support services. Most importantly, under this sort of posture the U.S. Navy would still be able to project power in the

South and East China Seas which is key to keeping many of our allies happy by deterring what they see as unruly Chinese aggression in these waters. While more work will need to be done in order to find a coherent way to enforce freedom of movement in this area without escalating tension with China needs to be done, I feel that the totality of these moves will make any enforcement of these rules less of an issue.

Long Term Investments

While the military is a great place to start in the development of U.S. soft power initiatives in the Asia-Pacific, they cannot do everything. More of the traditional soft power measures will still need to be maintained or expanded upon as they represent a modest investment for a relatively sizable gain. Here again the United States needs to rely upon its natural advantages, such as education and universal values in order to lay the foundation for advancement of many of these rising states, which will ultimately bring them closer to the United States and make cooperation and securing our interests there much easier. Many of these measures are intertwined with areas I have already talked about, such as the opening up of dialogue with questionable actors in the area to push freedoms, expanding and strengthening our disaster relief efforts in the region, and strengthening the economies and security of these nations. Over time, our commitment to advancement efforts in this area will shape our image in the minds of the population and governments of these states and come back to us in the form of stability and democracy, which has proven to be especially beneficial for trade; the foundation of our interest there in the first place. This would represent a much different path than we have taken several times before that ultimately does not work. What I feel the fundamental problems in these instances was the securing of U.S. interests at the cost of broad based development and

freedoms for the citizens of the countries we were involved in. By negotiating with bad actors in a way that exchanged money for resources, rather than money for *freedoms* and resources, we left out any chances for long term development and cooperation. Eventually, rather than bringing us closer together with these partners, the population, with a negative perception of the U.S., grew up to take over the governments and ultimately lashed back at the United States for years of injustice. This is a pattern I feel we need to break in the Asia-Pacific, which is a place that could easily fall into this pattern considering it's issues with human trafficking, narcotics trade, and large Muslim population. Thus it is essential that we responsibly develop our relationships with these nations with investment rather than bribery. This investment will necessitate the expansion of measures and programs I have mentioned as well as the expansion of education programs, which will work towards a broader and more intimate adaption of American values in the intellectual and leadership communities of these countries.

Conclusions

While many measures the United States has taken in the Asia-Pacific thus far have been constructive, such as the TPP and broader diplomatic ties with nontraditional actors, the restructuring of the military would be a key move to settle the current tension between itself and China, helping to bring them into the fold for conversation and compromise. I feel the best way to pursue this restructuring would also be done in a way that works to expand our soft power goals. The U.S. military's forward position, and massive capability and workforce make it an ideal organization to be put to work to build positive U.S. sentiment abroad. Over time, much of this investment and integration will pull the region into our area of influence. This represents a much more constructive and coherent strategy when compared to the emerging trend which

seems to be an effort to pull these countries away from China. Not only is this not constructive, but it is a battle we cannot win considering China's geography and trade relationship with its neighbors. Ultimately, if the United States wants to secure its interests in the Asia-Pacific it needs to play the long game by learning its lesson from South America and the Middle East. This will not only involve playing nice and working through multilateral organizations, but also backing down rhetoric and not always demanding leadership and priority status. If these recommendations are followed the United States has a good chance of being the center hub of trade and discourse in the region. If not, potential struggles abound and any intervention will most likely leave the United States less credible than it would have been if it had just stayed out altogether. The right strategy here is the one that garners the most favor with actors in the region.

To conclude, in this paper I have shown how the U.S. history of intervention in the Middle East has created an environment that is preclusive to U.S. involvement in the region. Historical U.S. support for authoritarian actors in the region and current aggressive security measures there have had counterproductive results and created serious costs for the United States in the way of public image, economic burden and allied complacency. I have argued further that in light of these costs the United States should resign from its activist policies in favor of measured retrenchment and an offshore balancing role. By securing critical nodes of the maritime commons and continuing to develop a flexible military footprint with strong naval and air assets the United States can continue to ensure its security at home and abroad. However, I have also shown that while the Middle East is a dead end to U.S. interests, new interests are arising in the Asia-Pacific that present both new challenges and new opportunities to U.S. global hegemony. In order to maintain its relative comfort the United States will have to invest in this

area using a soft power strategy that seeks to co-opt its would be challengers by using its massive advantages in the areas of economics and security. It is my belief, that together these policies of measured retrenchment along with soft power investment in critical areas is what will secure U.S. hegemony in the new coming era of international power.

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