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The concept of a “U.S. pivot to Asia”—referring to the turning of U.S. attention toward Asia in U.S. foreign policy—has traveled far since it was first coined by the Obama administration in 2011. More recently, to emphasize elements of continuity between the Obama administration’s policy and the policies of previous administrations and to stress the argument that the U.S. never “left” the Asia Pacific region in the first place, the Obama administration has expressed a preference for the term “rebalance” over “pivot.” There is much attention from both policy and academic circles being paid to the origins and evolution of this U.S. “rebalance toward Asia,” of which the excellent edited volume by Dr. Hugo Meijer, a lecturer in defense studies at King’s College London, United Kingdom, is a tangible demonstration.

Origins and Evolution of the US Rebalance toward Asia: Diplomatic, Military, and Economic Dimensions delivers on what it sets out to do, which is to provide the most comprehensive and updated discussion of the meaning and instruments of the U.S. rebalance toward Asia. While edited volumes can contain contributions of variable quality, the contributions in this volume are universally strong and knit tightly together, and the text is well-structured and well-thought out. The introduction is written by the volume editor and the conclusion, by François Godman, Professor of Political Science at Sciences Po, France. In the introduction, Meijer offers a comprehensive overview of the configuration of the world’s superpowers and an assessment of U.S. primacy in world politics; he also provides a deep analysis of prospects and challenges for the U.S. in its rebalance toward Asia. Here, Meijer also underlines four main themes emerging from the contributing authors: (i) the hopelessness of a U.S. containment strategy towards China in the post-Cold War era, (ii) the multidimensionality of the U.S. rebalance towards the Asia Pacific region, (iii) the continuity and discontinuity of the U.S. rebalance towards Asia, and (iv) the domestic and international challenges to the U.S. rebalancing towards Asia.

The volume is divided into two main parts. Part one, consisting of four chapters, begins with McDevitt’s “The Origin and Evolution of the Rebalance,” which provides an excellent explanation of why the Obama administration put forth the notion of rebalance. It is underlined that any “rebalancing” policy should be viewed as an ongoing effort to ensure that the U.S. retains its dominant position in Asia, where global economics and politics are likely to be centered in the 21st century. Any rebalance is very much a continuation of U.S. strategic vision for itself in East Asia, says McDevitt. This is reconfirmed in chapter two, “Change and Continuity in America’s Asia Pivot: US Engagement with Multilateralism in the Asia Pacific,” by Tan. This contributor puts forth that the Obama administration’s policy with respect to Asia, though stylistically different from that of the George W. Bush administration, does not substantively change—neither in terms of its engagement with Asia nor in terms of its involvement in Asia’s multilateral processes—the broad strategy pursued by the United States toward Asia throughout the post-cold war period.

Chapter three, “The Military Rebalance as Retcon,” by Jensen and Shibuya demonstrates that the military dimension of the rebalance is more a matter of continuity than revolution. These contributors conclude that “the actions that appear to herald a more robust U.S. military presence in the region are more plan than reality and reflect ideas in motion since at least 2000” (p.96). Chapter four, “The Political Economy of the US Rebalance: Revisiting the ‘Web of Linkages’ between National Security and Economic Prosperity,” by Rougé, provides a critical assessment of the role of the economic component in the “multidimensional” U.S. rebalancing, with a particular focus on the Trans-Pacific Partnership and trade relations between the U.S. and China. This chapter provides an excellent account of

how the economic dimension of the U.S. rebalance can be perceived “as part of a major readjustment in the complex ‘web of linkages’ between the security and economic components of [the] American presence in the Asia Pacific [region] since the end of World War II” (p. 109).

Part two of the volume includes six chapters that assess regional responses to the U.S. rebalance. The first three chapters describe how the shifting of U.S. resources to Asia has been conceived by China, Japan, South Korea, and other nations in Southeast Asia. Duchâtel and Puig’s chapter examines how Chinese scholars, think tank experts, and government officials view the U.S. pivot to Asia and its consequences with respect to China. Kim’s chapter demonstrates how and why Japan’s Abe government and South Korea’s Park Geun-hye government support and cooperate with the U.S. in the implementation of the rebalance in Asia. Frécon and Meijer’s chapter touches on the inextricable link between U.S. interests and developments in Southeast Asia. In particular, this chapter offers a deep analysis of how a strengthened U.S. military presence in Southeast Asia has impacted the regional nations’ security and foreign policies.

The other three chapters report from the perspectives of Russia and the EU on the U.S. strategic return to Asia and highlight impacts and implications thereof for Russia and the EU, specifically. Howarth examines the implications of the shift of U.S. priorities from West to the East on European security and NATO. It is highlighted that “...the world around the EU is changing rapidly—and not for the better. The U.S. rebalancing toward Asia is but one of a host of changes in the geostrategic context that are having a major impact on the EU’s ability to emerge as a consequential actor on even the regional stage” (p. 213). Stumbaum’s chapter discusses the future scenarios of the U.S.–EU interplay in Asia, while Facon’s chapter analyzes why Russia’s attitude towards the United States’ strategic refocus on the Asia Pacific region has been strikingly muted.

In the conclusion, Godement does little to tie the discussions together. Instead, he initiates another line of inquiry by asking, “The U.S. Rebalance toward Asia: Whither Sino-American Relations” (p.275)? His writing frames the discussion around current competitive trends in U.S.–China relations in the context of increased U.S. engagement in Asia. Godement also argues that there is increasing interdependence and sector-to-sector cooperation between China and the U.S. It is underscored that the extent to which the Obama administration’s shifting towards Asia will balance or deter the competition that is driving the U.S. and China to conflict remains to be seen.

This volume covers an impressive combination of broad international perspectives on the objectives and implementation of the U.S. rebalance towards Asia. Using a multifaceted approach, it sheds light on all major dimensions of U.S. engagement in Asia, from diplomatic to economic and military. The volume has much to contribute for both policy makers and scholars of U.S. foreign policy and world politics in general. While analysts and commentators have written extensively on the expansion of U.S. engagement in Asia, the pieces most commonly produced typically provide little insight into the *why*—i.e. an analysis of the drivers and players—behind U.S. approach to Asia. In this volume, in contrast, each chapter blends a combination of knowledge, critical analysis, and research methods in order to provide an examination of the perspectives, experiences, and objectives of the players involved. Given the ongoing implementation of U.S. rebalance in Asia and the increasing importance of this region in world politics, this volume provides a solid foundation for policy and academic circles to build on.

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