

Correspondence

Perspectives on the Pivot

Nicholas D. Anderson

Nina Silove

To the Editors (Nicholas D. Anderson writes):

In “The Pivot before the Pivot: U.S. Strategy to Preserve the Power Balance in Asia,” Nina Silove provides an illuminating history of U.S. policy in Asia since 2001.¹ She argues that, with the goal of preserving the balance of power in the Asia Pacific, the George W. Bush administration undertook a substantial “reorientation strategy” in the early 2000s, combining internal balancing, external balancing, and expanded engagement. Three problems, however, weaken Silove’s argument that the Bush administration engaged in internal and external balancing in Asia.

First, Silove fails to provide a clear and coherent definition of balancing, both internal and external. To be fair, Silove does provide a few cursory definitions. She defines balancing as a strategy in which a state “aims to match the rate of growth of the rising power to maintain the power balance.” She then defines internal balancing as efforts to “increas[e] the power of the hegemonic state,” and external balancing as steps to “increas[e] the power of the alliance led by the hegemon” (p. 66). Silove’s definitions lack specificity, however, including a cataloguing of the sort of behaviors one would expect to observe if balancing were taking place.² Without this necessary specificity, Silove can use a variety of different behaviors, which may or may not constitute balancing, to bolster her claims.

Second, because Silove does not provide a clear definition of balancing, a great deal of the evidence that she uses to argue that the Bush administration pursued a policy of balancing in the Asia Pacific is unconvincing. There are two issues here. First, much of the evidence Silove draws upon begins in 2004, the year she claims that the United States implemented its “pivot before the pivot” (pp. 67–73). But because she does not describe what the United States was doing in Asia before 2004, it is difficult to evaluate whether this strategic “reorientation” represented a substantive change from what preceded it. Second, some of Silove’s indicators of balancing do not well reflect traditional understandings of this behavior. For instance, in discussing U.S. troop withdrawals from the region, Silove notes that “U.S. officials believed that South Korea and Japan

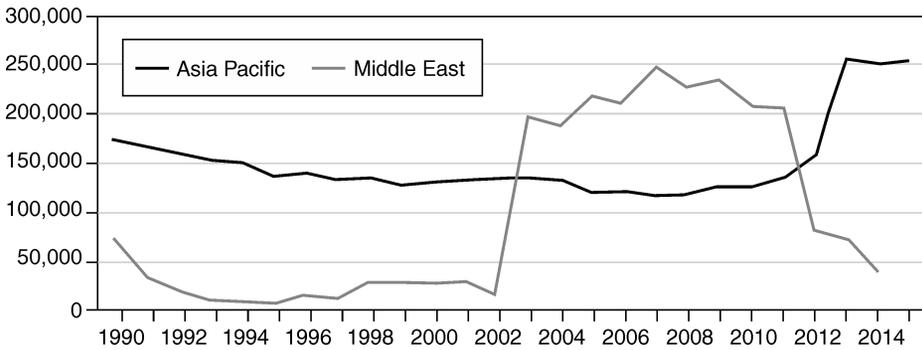
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1. Nina Silove, “The Pivot before the Pivot: U.S. Strategy to Preserve the Power Balance in Asia,” *International Security*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Spring 2016), pp. 45–88.

2. For a recent, lucid definition, see Joseph M. Parent and Sebastian Rosato, “Balancing in Neorealism,” *International Security*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Fall 2015), p. 56.

Figure 1. U.S. Military Personnel in the Asia Pacific and the Middle East, 1990–2015



SOURCES: The Asia Pacific here includes Alaska and Hawaii. Tim Kane, “Global U.S. Troop Deployment, 1950–2005,” *Heritage Foundation Center for Data Analysis Report*, 06-02 (Washington, D.C.: Heritage Foundation, 2006), <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2006/05/global-us-troop-deployment-1950-2005>; and Department of Defense, Defense Manpower Data Center, “DoD Personnel, Workforce Reports & Publications” (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 2016), https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/dwp/dwp_reports.jsp.

had the capacity to assume more responsibility for their own defenses and for regional security” (p. 75). This sounds more like burden-shifting—even buck-passing—than balancing. She also points out that the United States took measures to encourage its regional allies and partners “to forge new formal security relationships with one another” (p. 78). Again, encouraging allies and partners to work together to do more to contribute to regional security does not sound like external balancing as it is traditionally understood. Although some of her evidence certainly could constitute balancing behavior, what is necessary to properly evaluate her claims is a broader temporal context and a clearer, more systematic definition of balancing.

Third, an alternative set of indicators suggests that the United States did not initiate the material commitments to the region that calling a policy “balancing” should reasonably require. In terms of internal balancing, the United States did boost its defense expenditure, annually averaging \$451.6 billion from 1990 to 2000, then rising to \$587.9 billion from 2001 to 2009.³ There are also sharp increases in the key years of interest, with increases of 12, 13, and 9 percent from 2002 to 2004. Although it is difficult to know precisely where these increases took place, it seems likely that the majority are accounted for in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, not in the Asia Pacific. An alternative indicator of balancing is the number of U.S. troops stationed in the region. Figure 1 displays the number of U.S. troops in the Asia Pacific and the Middle East from 1990 to 2015. Three aspects of the figure stand out. First, until about 2009, there had been a steady, long-term decline in the number of troops stationed in the Asia Pacific. Second, in 2004, when Silove argues that the Bush administration implemented the “pivot be-

3. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Military Expenditure Database, 2016, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>.

fore the pivot,” the number of troops stationed in the Asia Pacific declined significantly. Third, this decline occurred in the context of a massive increase in U.S. military personnel being deployed to the Middle East. Thus, it is not clear that the United States was engaged in internal balancing in Asia through the 2000s.

As regards external balancing, the United States formed no new defensive alliances in the Asia Pacific during this period, the most recent being the 1986 reconstitution of ANZUS.⁴ The United States did increase deployments to the Philippines and Australia, but these began in 2012, well after Silove claims that the “pivot before the pivot” was under way. Moreover, U.S. arms sales to states in the Asia Pacific declined substantially, annually averaging \$4.4 billion from 1990 to 2000, but dropping off to \$2 billion from 2001 to 2009.⁵

In sum, the United States does not appear to have engaged in internal and external balancing in the Asia Pacific during the George W. Bush administration. Silove’s evidence needs to be understood within a broader temporal context and alongside traditional indicators of U.S. power projection into the region, which indicate a substantial decline of U.S. power. Given the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States appears to have been economizing its power in Asia—trying to do more with less. Rather than balancing, the United States appears to have been mildly retrenching in the region.

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Nina Silove Replies:

In response to my article “The Pivot before the Pivot: U.S. Strategy to Preserve the Power Balance in Asia,” Nicholas Anderson argues that U.S. strategy toward Asia has involved “mild retrenchment” rather than balancing.¹ He bases his assessment on three quantitative indicators: troops, spending, and alliances; he also makes an argument about timing. I address each of these points below.

First, although the number of forward-deployed troops seems a commonsense indicator, in this case it produces an incorrect interpretation of the U.S. strategy in Asia.² The George W. Bush administration’s goal was to preserve the United States’ “favorable” global position.³ In defense policy, the means to that end was to be “transforma-

4. “Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty,” September 1, 1951, TIAS 2493; 3 UST 3423–3425.

5. SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, 2016, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers>.

1. Nina Silove, “The Pivot before the Pivot: U.S. Strategy to Preserve the Power Balance in Asia,” *International Security*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Spring 2016), pp. 45–88. I rely on Kenneth Waltz’s definitions of balancing and do not aim to develop my own. *Ibid.*, p. 46 n. 9.

2. Anderson’s figure does not appear to be an accurate reflection of its sources. For example, a comparison of the following datasets does not reveal the spike Anderson charts to 250,000 troops in the Asia Pacific in 2013, counting Alaska, Guam, Hawaii, Japan, and South Korea (all other locations having fewer than 1,000 troops). Defense Manpower Data Center, *Military and Civilian Personnel by Service/Agency by State/Country*, December 31, 2012, and June 30, 2014, https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/dwp/dwp_reports.jsp.

3. Silove, “The Pivot before the Pivot,” p. 55.

tion," a process that would take advantage of the emerging "revolution in military affairs." According to this thinking, forward-deployed forces in the Asia Pacific would become increasingly inefficient, particularly for managing military competition with China. Moreover, U.S. officials were concerned that American troops in Japan and South Korea were vulnerable to North Korean and Chinese missiles, were constrained in their use in possible China contingencies, and were the cause of unnecessary friction in the alliance relationships because of their proximity to population centers.

The Bush administration's desire to maintain the United States' global advantage made retrenchment unthinkable. Instead, defense planners sought to relocate some forward-deployed forces to U.S. territories adjacent to the region; improve their capacity for rapid deployment; and forge new, distributed, and flexible basing arrangements with allies and partners, a plan they summarized with the mantra "capabilities, not numbers."

Second, Anderson argues that there was no increase in U.S. military spending in the Asia Pacific from 2001 to 2009 (thereby implying incorrectly that, according to my argument, significant changes in enacted U.S. strategy should be observed in 2001–04). He provides no specific figures to support this claim, likely because the defense budget cannot accurately be analyzed on a region-by-region basis. My best but rough and conservative estimate is that U.S. spending related solely or primarily to the Asia Pacific did increase from 2004, but only by approximately \$5 billion per year in 2004–11 and \$12 billion per year 2012–16.⁴ These are small numbers. They are also misleading. The redeployment of assets to the Pacific—including an additional aircraft carrier (in 2008) and three submarines (in 2004, 2009, and 2014), to mention only the mightiest and costliest assets—is represented only by the assets' operating costs, not their much higher procurement costs. In this case, military spending as a metric conceals increases in capabilities.

Third, Anderson's argument that the United States did not forge a new Asian alliance does not acknowledge the new partnership agreements that it signed with India and Singapore. Also, Anderson discounts incorrectly the agreement to rotate U.S. troops to Australia because he dates it at 2012, "well after" 2004. This agreement, however, dates back to 2004, two years after Director of the Office of Net Assessment (ONA) Andrew Marshall recommended it to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to effect the planned "shift in focus toward Asia."⁵ Furthermore, U.S. efforts to build multi-lateral interoperability were not premised on allies and partners operating—by themselves or together—independently of the United States, as Anderson suggests. The key

4. These figures are derived in part from U.S. Pacific Command, "'Top 4' Construction Efforts," briefing to the Senate Armed Services Committee, April 16, 2015; and Michael O'Hanlon, "Rebalancing the U.S. Military in Asia and the Pacific" (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, June 9, 2013), <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/rebalancing-the-u-s-military-in-asia-and-the-pacific/>.

5. Memo from Andy Marshall to Secretary of Defense, "Near Term Actions to Begin Shift of Focus towards Asia," *Rumsfeld Papers*, May 2, 2002, <http://library.rumsfeld.com/doclib/sp/2518/2002-05-02%20from%20Andy%20Marshall%20re%20Near%20Term%20Actions%20to%20Begin%20Shift%20of%20Focus%20Towards%20Asia.pdf>; and Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, "Key Outcomes from AUSMIN 2004," *Australia-United States Ministerial Consultations*, 2004, <http://dfat.gov.au/geo/united-states-of-america/ausmin/Pages/australia-united-states-ministerial-consultations-key-outcomes-from-ausmin-2004.aspx>

characteristic of the intended “network” I describe, which may be understood as a quasi- or latent multilateral alliance, was that it would be “federated” under U.S. leadership. Defense planners’ parallel efforts to improve bilateral interoperability with each network member underscore their quest to entrench the United States in Asia.

Finally, the timeline of the pivot is as follows: the planning for the reorientation began in 2001, when Rumsfeld tasked ONA with taking the lead in devising a new defense strategy. ONA had been at the forefront of working on the implications of China’s rise during the 1990s, but the office had been less influential in the Bill Clinton administration. This defense planning intersected with an interagency Asia strategy process, which began in 2003. Both planning processes had concluded by mid-2004.

The shift by U.S. officials from planning to implementing the reorientation explains why there were changes in U.S. behavior from 2004. For each change, I note whether it was a new initiative or an expansion or modification of an existing effort. Thus, contrary to Anderson’s suggestion, I do address the state of U.S. outputs pre-2004. My conclusion that the pivot commenced in 2004 rests on the significance of the individual changes, their large number and simultaneity, and their consistency with the 2001–04 plans.

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