

GRAND STRATEGY AND NAVAL POWER: THE UNITES STATES OF AMERICA IN THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 21ST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

The article investigates the implementation of the US Grand Strategy in Asia-Pacific. The focus will be on the political aspects (evaluation-decision-action) of the most obvious strategic component: the redistribution of the US fleet in the area, signaling Washington's intentions to position itself in the face of the dynamics of changes in that region. The analysis will focus on Obama administration, in the period comprised between 2009 and 2016, which launched the idea of the American Pivot in the Pacific. Two central aspects of US government policy will be discussed: 1) the issue of national / international security in the face of the Chinese rise, especially related to the budget investment that China has made in its naval forces; 2) the great american concern about the destabilizing potential of an arms race in the area, considering the way that US government has watched the response that countries like Japan and India have given in relation to Chinese intentions. It will also be discussed how the US has privileged the naval component of its grand strategy to secure a military security situation that serves its geopolitical interests within a coalition alliance in the Pacific region and which includes Japan, Australia, and South Korea as its main partners.

Key Words: Grand Strategy. USA. China. Geopolitics. Naval Power.

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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary International Relations, there are two strongly interdependent situations: the rise of the Asia-Pacific region, and especially China, as a dynamic center of world power, and the decisions and actions taken by the United States to preserve its hegemonic position in the global scenario.

Both processes are strongly interspersed, and affect some of the major dimensions of world politics, namely strategic-military, diplomatic and economic relations. In spite of disagreements about the best theoretical tools for studying this phenomenon, there is a common point shared by observers, analysts, and researchers in the field: the desire of successive US governments to maintain the country's primacy faces increasing difficulties and challenges in adapting to the speed of change of rivals, and even of allies and partners in the Pacific region.

China's growth monitoring and the conflict between geopolitical needs and aspirations of this country and of states like Japan, India, and the several governments in the South China Sea, have requested a shift in Washington's political stance. After being the leader of a coalition of advanced capitalist nations whose center of concern was in Europe, the United States finds itself obliged to focus increasing power resources on the Pacific Ocean. This leads to a shift of priorities in order to maximize the American international weight in the region in a sort of political juggling – after all, the issues in Eastern Europe and the Middle East have escalated in these early decades of the twenty-first century, and cannot be abandoned due to what happens in extreme Asia for the simple fact that the United States plays a unique role in stabilizing these regions.

To cope with this historic change, the USA executes the so-called Pivot to Asia. During his first presidential term (2009-2013), President Barack Obama made this option explicit through his statements as well as through Foreign Secretary Hillary Clinton's statements. (CLINTON: 2011; CAMPBELL, 2016: 27-28). Because of the fact that he inherited two complicated situations from George W. Bush administration (2001-2009), that is, the military occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq and the 2008 economic crisis, Obama must govern in a context in which China is growing rapidly, in addition to a global perception that the USA has been losing its material conditions and political capacity to exercise hegemony in international affairs.

In order to implement the Pivot to Asia, or rebalance, Obama administration must take into account the material difficulties exacerbated by the economic crisis, and the attention shift and strategic-diplomatic capacity represented by the focus on the so-called War on Terror. In this regard, it is necessary to employ a Grand Strategy that allows the use of the main variables of the US national power. The goal is a maximizing implementation of key US power variables to show credibility to the most powerful state players in the Asia-Pacific, at the same time that domestic economic issues are approached and it is assured to allies in Europe and in the Middle East that Washington will not rush out of these areas.

These variables are distributed into the three dimensions already mentioned: diplomatic, military-strategic and economic. In this article, emphasis will be on the military-strategic dimension, but around the naval component.

This is explained by three historical reasons:

- the centrality of naval forces in defending US interests since the nineteenth century;
- the fact that naval power has been rivaled precisely in the Asia-Pacific, and it occurs not only in relation to countries seen as rivals (China and Russia), but also regarding the modernization and expansion of the fleets of allies or, at least, partners countries (Australia, Japan, South Korea and India).

The article will be divided into four sections. The first will discuss the concept of grand strategy, and how it has been used to explain the US foreign policy – and, consequently, security policy – after the Cold War. The goal is to follow an idea outlined by Colin Gray when studying the problems of politics and war in *International Relations*: “see the forest not the trees.” In the second section, the American Pivot will be presented, with a discussion of when it was publicly declared (Obama administration) and the structural factors that pointed to its implementation from Bush administration (2001-2009). In the third section, the naval element of the American Pivot will be addressed, and why maintaining sea control in the Pacific region has become central to Washington’s foreign policy. Finally, some conclusions and possibilities for future research will be presented.

As the basic idea is to study the US Grand Strategy, it was decided, within the limits of this article, to focus on US relations with state players in the Asia-Pacific. With this observation, the relevant presence and influence of non-state players will be considered (such as private technology groups,

or terrorism as a security threat), but will not be subject to a more articulate approach in this work.

US GRAND STRATEGY AFTER THE END OF COLD WAR

GRAND STRATEGY – THE CONCEPT

It is possible to discuss International Relations phenomena through the concept of grand strategy. There is a widespread and interchangeable use of this term to explain the diplomatic relations of states in times of peace, war, or during military interventions. Similarly, this idea is also employed to explain the actions of transnational corporations or violence by terrorist organizations. The use is comprehensive, and deserves to be discussed to better articulate its definition and application.

John Gaddis advocates a broad definition, aimed at those who have a more generalist and erudite understanding of the factors surrounding international politics.

Based on his studies on the Cold War, he defends a not so specialized view, able to articulate the different historical and contextual elements at stake. For him, the grand strategy concerns the calculated relationship between available means and broad ends, and the use of all possible means to achieve politically established goals (GADDIS, 2009).

According to Sayle (2011), the modern use of this term has its origin in the works of Liddel Hart, who conceived the grand strategy within a top-down model, that is, hierarchically established by decision makers in the state sphere. The grand strategy would initially be employed to coordinate and direct all resources of a nation, or group of nations, toward the political goal of war. This understanding is strongly marked by British experience in World War I. Sayle correctly points out that the main inconvenience of this notion is that it is enclosed in a context of total war, besides being of little use in explaining situations where direct war conflict does not exist or it is of very low intensity. Sayle (2011) then presents the definition proposed by Luttwark

All states have a grand strategy, whether they know it or not. That is inevitable because grand strategy is simply the level at which

knowledge and persuasion, or in modern terms, intelligence and diplomacy, interact with military strength to determine outcomes in a world of other states with their own “grand strategies.”

This definition would not be restricted to the “world of war,” and could be employed in a number of situations in which states operate.

However, Sayle addresses aspects that go beyond a purely operational conceptualization of grand strategy. For him, the elements of belief present in certain contexts and certain societies should be taken into account in this definition. Thus, bureaucrats and politicians with decision-making power would not only make rational calculations. These decision makers would be influenced by successful experiences, failures, and prejudices existing in societies and governments. The evaluations and decisions made by these individual players would have a historicity related to policies previously taken and implemented, along with more immediate and contemporary events. In short, ideational factors would play a role in executing and understanding the concept of grand strategy.

Taking into account the material and ideational factors as well as the states’ politics in times of war and peace, Peter Layton conceptualizes the grand strategy as follows:

Grand Strategy is concerned with assembling the manpower, money and material necessary to build and sustain the means needed. Depending on the grand strategy, these resources can be accessed domestically or internationally, from private or government sources, or in some complex combination. Importantly, a grand strategy must also build the legitimacy and soft power necessary to be implemented successfully (LAYTON, 2011: 58).

The author mentions private sources in addition to government sources, or an arrangement between them. Bearing this in mind is extremely important in the current context of International Relations, especially when considering the role of private groups in establishing US government policies, such as cyber technology, and impacting domestic policy, diplomacy, and defense – and, as a consequence, the grand strategy.

This definition also incorporates the elements of domestic politics into the concept. But there is yet another component that Layton presents: “Grand Strategy tries to shape the future in a

certain sequence into a preferred construct that displays the desired orderliness and stability. (...) grand strategy is about taking a planned series of successive actions to create a preferred world at some future time" (LAYTON, 2011: 59).

Thus, the concept of grand strategy incorporates a rational calculation relating means and ends, participates in the discussion and implementation of state policy, takes into account ideational (or ideological) and material factors, highlights domestic politics within states at the same time that part of the events takes place in the international environment, recognizes the possibility of appeal to private players and their use combined with the action of state players and, as a conclusion, takes into account need and desire to shape the future according to the preferences of the players involved.

THE USA'S GRAND STRATEGY IN THE 1990S

During the Cold War, the starting point of the USA's grand strategy can be symbolically found in George Kennan's article published on the *Foreign Affairs* magazine, titled 'The Sources of Soviet Conduct' (Kennan: 1947). From an interpretation of what he called a "siege mentality" and "a historical fear" in relation to Western peoples, which had their origins in the eighteenth-century Imperial Russia, the author supported the idea that the Soviet Union under Stalin would try to expand its sphere of influence against the US interests. The appropriate response of the US government would be to implement a global policy of containing Soviet aspirations and aggressions, in order to impose increasing costs on the USSR's geopolitical ambitions.

From this idea, American leaders and strategists tried to implement a new dynamic in the construction of the US foreign policy. Global military alliances were forged, sponsoring the creation of worldwide diplomatic and economic institutions and, ultimately, restricting any more nationalistic attempts to Third World countries' empowerment. The diplomacy executed by Henry Kissinger from 1969 to 1977 is taken as an example of this view.

After the end of the Cold War, Barry Posen and Andrew Ross defended the idea that four models of grand strategy were competing to determine the US foreign policy (POSEN & ROSS, 2000: 3-7): neo-isolationism, selective engagement, cooperative security, and primacy.

Observing the international situation from the mid-1990s, the authors considered that the Soviet collapse had opened a unique period in the history of international relations: the USA was in the unprecedented position as the only existing superpower, being powerful in economic, military and diplomatic aspects, and with no rival in the nearest time horizon.

Such a situation created a problem in relation to building a state policy that would replace the Doctrine of Containment. Suri summarizes this problem by saying that the implementation of a major US strategy was complicated by the fact that, in the 1990s, the USA no longer faced a clear adversary that combined political power, economic capacity, military strength and a rival ideology. (SURI: 2009).

Posen and Ross describe these great strategies as follows:

– Neo-isolationism: the least ambitious of the options. In this view, internationalism would be seen as counterproductive. Involvement in complex and costly military alliances had lost its *raison d'être* with the end of the USSR, and the refusal to face this reality led to overcommitment and spending on maintaining a military projection in which allies were more interested than the USA itself. The final proposal would be a global disengagement and readjustment of the defense forces to serve exclusively to protect the United States.

– Selective Engagement: This grand strategy would seek to secure peace between powers with substantial industrial resources and military potential. In other words, it would seek to maintain a security balance between the so-called great powers. Over the 1990s, selective engagement took into account that an industrially strong country would not necessarily translate this into military power, as it was seen in the cases of Japan and newly unified Germany. The engaged US presence on the international scene would take place to ensure security, correcting the historical propensity of war between them (Japan and China in Asia, for example).

– Cooperative Security: The strongest feature of this great strategy is the acceptance of the idea that there are indivisible gains in the existence of peace. The USA should expand its conception of national interest toward an understanding that the existence of a world state of peace is vital to its security. From a liberal conception of international relations, cooperative security understands most of the great powers existing at that time as liberal democracies, which would prefer diplomacy to war.

– Primacy: this grand strategy is based on a central conception: only the US preponderance guarantees peace on the international scene. In other words, it is the real hegemony of the United States, exercised in its hard (warlike capacity, economy) and soft (ideology, culture, etc.) aspects, which can guarantee a situation of balance and constraint of violence at the international level. A military alliance like NATO only maintained the peace because the power imbalance among its members greatly favored the USA. In a draft of an official document that was obtained by the NYT, the Defense Planning Guidance, and made during George H. W. Bush administration, the regions of the world most likely to produce rival powers would be the Western Europe, Far East, the territories of the former USSR, and the Southeast Asia. Thus, no arrangement capable of generating an anti-American military alliance should be allowed.

At the end of the article, Posen and Ross conclude that the strategy adopted by the US government under Clinton administration was what they called the Selective (but Cooperative) Primacy. Based on the 1996 National Security Strategy of Engagement, the authors argue that the tone of the document blends the language of cooperative security, selective engagement, and primacy. Rhetoric alternates the ideas of cooperative security with a broader conception of national interest, synthesized in engagement and enlargement: the USA should engage in world affairs in order to increase the community of countries that accepted liberalism both in its political form – liberal democracy – and in its economic form – market economy. Neo-isolationism is explicitly rejected given the inconveniences it would entail for the US interests, and there is an emphasis on the unique military capabilities of the United States. Finally, there is repeated mention that the USA should exercise its leadership, under multilateral and unilateral conditions, both interpreted by researchers as an inclination toward primacy.

From the discussion of Posen and Ross, it is possible to analyze the USA's grand strategy toward the Asia-Pacific as the so-called Pivot. Posen and Ross' conceptual formalization will be the basis for the definition of grand strategy employed here, but other authors analyzing foreign policy and the US involvement in strategic-military issues will be also considered.

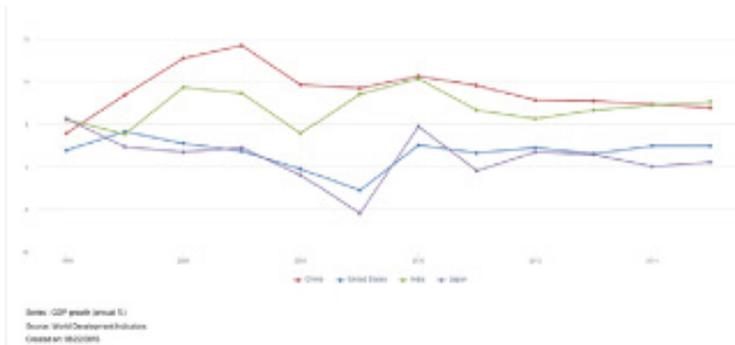
THE AMERICAN PIVOT TO THE ASIA-PACIFIC

From 2009, with Barack Obama's inauguration, two realities

were imposed on the USA and, directly or indirectly, on the rest of the world: the economic crisis that begun in 2008, and the effects of prolonged involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq, following the so-called War on Terror.

At the same time that the USA suffered the effects of the economic crisis, the Asia-Pacific showed a high rate of economic growth. In Graph 1, GNP growth figures (1990-2015) of four countries are presented for comparison purposes. It can be seen that in 2009, the consolidated and allied capitalist powers, the United States and Japan, had a GDP of -2.8% and -5.5%, respectively. China presented growth of 9.2%, and India of 8.5%. Even when American and Japanese numbers improve, in later years, Chinese and Indian rates remain high (even as they decline alternately).

Graph 1: GDP - China, USA India and Japan (1990-2015)



Source: World Bank

When comparing defense budget in the Asia-Pacific, there is an increase in the numbers of China and India, which is most evident when the US-Japan allies are taken into consideration. According to SIPRI data (Tables 1 and 2 and Graph 2), in 2009, China spent 2.1% of GDP in the defense sector, totaling US\$ 105,634 billion, while India spent 2.9%, which corresponded to US\$ 38,722 billion. In the same period, the USA spent 4.6%, equivalent to US\$ 668,567 billion, and Japan, 1%, about US\$ 51,465 billion.

Table 1 – Military Expenditures by Country, as percentage of GDP - 1988-2015.

percentage of GDP - 1988-2015.

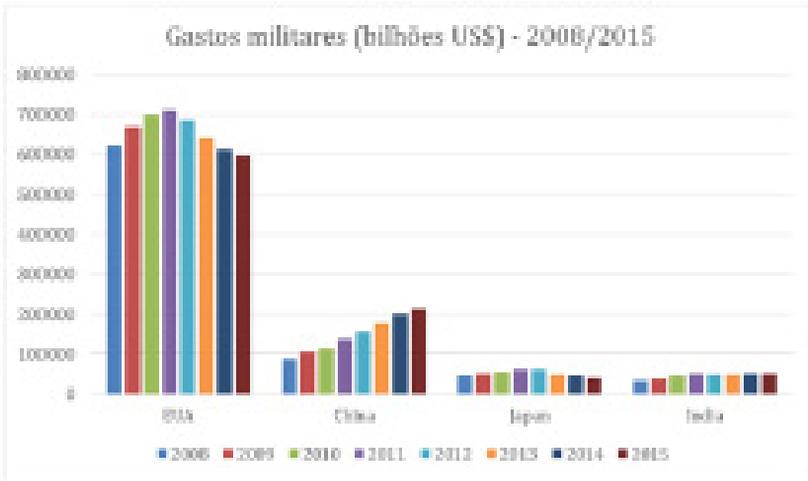
Country	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
USA	4,2%	4,6%	4,7%	4,6%	4,2%	3,8%	3,5%	3,3%
China,P.R. [†]	1,9%	2,1%	1,9%	1,9%	1,9%	1,9%	1,91%	1,9%
Japan	1,0%	1,0%	1,0%	1,0%	1,0%	1,0%	1,0%	1,0%
India	2,6%	2,9%	2,7%	2,6%	2,5%	2,4%	2,5%	2,3%

Source: SIPRI

Table 2 - Military Expenditures by Country, in Current Dollars (Billions) - 2008/2015

Country	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
USA	621131	668567	698180	711338	684780	639704	609914	596024
China [‡]	86412	105634	115701	137967	157446	177848	199651	214787
Japan	46361	51465	54655	60762	60012	49024	45867	40885
India	33002	38722	46090	49634	47217	47404	50914	51257

Source: SIPRI



Source: Graph 2 created by the author from Table 2 data.

According to the evolution of tables and graphs, we have the following situation in 2015: China, 1.9%, (US\$ 214,787 billion), India, 2.3% (US\$ 51,257 billion), the USA, 3.3% (US\$ 596,024 billion) and Japan, 1% (US\$ 40,885 billion). Japan and the USA decrease expenditures, while China and India increase them significantly, even decreasing the percentage of GDP applied in defense.

The numbers indicated the level and speed of change in terms of geopolitical importance in the Asia-Pacific, at a time when American focus was on the Middle East and on the slow evolution of disagreements with Russia in Europe and again in the Middle East. With the economic crisis, it is also necessary to shrink the budget directed to the military sector.

In 2011, in an article published by the Foreign Policy magazine, the then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton states the reasons for the change:

The Asia-Pacific has become a key driver of global politics. Stretching from the Indian subcontinent to the western shores of the Americas, the region spans two oceans — the Pacific and the Indian — that are increasingly linked by shipping and strategy. It boasts almost half the world’s population. It includes many of the key engines of the global economy, as well as

the largest emitters of greenhouse gases. It is home to several of our key allies and important emerging powers like China, India, and Indonesia” (CLINTON, 2011).

Posteriorly, President Obama himself will also use another term, rebalance, to describe essentially the same set of policies.

Nonetheless, this is only part of the story. When it comes to the United States, there is always a good search for continuity patterns over time. Although the American Pivot statement has fulfilled a contextual need of the foreign – and even domestic – policy in the USA since 2009, it makes little sense to say that it is a total innovation.

Nina Silove (2016) states that the perception of that the USA should start turning its attention to the Asia-Pacific was established under George W. Bush administration. For her, the substance of the pivot had already been outlined in the early twenty-first century. Using the term reorientation (which for her would incorporate both Obama administration’s pivot and rebalance concepts, as well as the concern about Asia during Bush’s first term), she argues that the main operators of the US foreign policy was already preparing this “shift.”

From a review of several key US government documents, as well as access to Donald Rumsfeld’s personal archive, she supports the idea that Bush administration’s original foreign policy program was centered on a mechanism for agreement between great powers (SILOVE, 2016: 53). In a long-term perspective, it was necessary to take into account the possibility of conciliation occurring simultaneously with some kind of political competition. In the long term, Asia-Pacific was the region most likely to see an emergent power which would be able to rival the United States.

According to Silove, the documents that were produced during this period were analyzed by Andrew Marshall, the then director of the Office of Net Assessment (ONA), a type of think tank assigned to elaborate scenarios, and which is within the structure of the Department of Defense. Marshall and his collaborators sought to incorporate the acceleration of technology diffusion into the economic sphere and its impact on the relationship between nations. Their conclusion was that there would be very rapid growth in the Pacific region, which would lead to a technological modernization of China, the epicenter of this development. The result would be a renewal of China’s military structure,

and a strengthening of China's ability to compete with the USA in the region, which could generate local instability with worldwide repercussions.

However, Silove affirms that the terrorist attack of 9/11/2001 drew due attention from these documents. Nevertheless, Bush administration has attempted to make changes in its defense stance to direct the country's attention to the Pacific. However, due to the strong reactions against the invasion of Iraq, and needs to combat terrorism created by the government itself, it was decided not to make any fuss about the US intentions so as not to create antagonisms with China and open a flank of confrontation at a time when the presence in the Middle East has created excessive demand on the USA.

From reading the Defense Strategy Review (DSR), Silove points to two factors that would become an integral part of the Asia-Pacific reorientation:

- China's growth was accepted as inevitable, and the USA should make no effort to contain it. The document view, shared by top Bush administration decision-makers, was that the United States should find a *modus vivendi* with the Chinese, and that this could be done by deepening economic ties.

- Despite this acceptance, the fact was that the document drew attention to the military aspect of a major US strategy toward the Pacific. China could develop the capabilities to counter and neutralize US military superiority in the Pacific by creating a technology of its own that could nullify Washington's naval advantage. In this case, it would be the so-called A2/AD (Anti-Access/Area Denial) technologies, which could pose a threat to the United States' ability to project power in the Pacific Ocean, and could be exported to many countries to limit the global advantage represented by the ocean control by the American fleet.

Finally, Silove concludes that the American Pivot to the Asia-Pacific should be understood as preserving the superior position that the country has in the region balance of power, which has been built since World War II. By deepening relations with its main allies (Japan, Australia and New Zealand), strengthening partnerships with countries with which it has zones of interest (the South China Sea nations, such as Thailand and the Philippines), and constantly seeking a more strategic relationship with India, Washington expects to build a context that stabilizes the region according to its interests.

From a security point of view, the USA starts favoring the naval dimension of its defense device.

NAVAL DIMENSION OF THE AMERICAN PIVOT MARITIME POWER

Maritime power transcends the purely military dimension. It is a broad concept based on three major elements: the control of international trade and commerce, the operations of warships in war, and the use of naval forces as an instrument of diplomacy, deterrence and political influence in time of peace (TANCREDI, 2010: 114-115).

An important dimension concerns the geoeconomic aspect of this power. In addition to trade, seabed fishing and mineral exploitation activities are part of a country's maritime capabilities. Tancredi (2010) argues that the importance of a naval force lies in enabling the control of sea use (or denying it to an opponent), and in affecting events and situations that happen on land. The development of technologies has enabled warships to face adversaries in the oceans, cruise missiles to destroy land targets that are hundreds or thousands of miles off their coasts and also information systems to be hacked furtively.

Modern navies operate on the surface of the oceans, in their depths, in the air, in outer space, and in cyberspace. Vector sets are based on surface ships, submarines, and airplanes, and weapon systems currently consist of missiles (anti-ship, anti-air, and cruise), torpedoes, mines, and cannons. In addition to war operations, war vessels are used for economic and naval blockade, for control and interdiction of so-called choke points and SLOCS, to combat piracy and to support the amphibious landing of soldiers.

Economic globalization would not exist without a global naval presence to guarantee the use of the oceans by different nations. The economic wealth of the major countries and blocs is not possible without control of the seas by naval forces. The USA maintains supremacy in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, and controls the major routes and choke points where world trade passes. It would be no exaggeration to say that the most obvious economic aspect of the American Pivot during Obama administration, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), could only be led by the United States because of its maritime power. However, this supremacy has been contested in the early twenty-first century, and precisely in the Pacific region.

NAVAL DIMENSION OF THE AMERICAN PIVOT

In 2012, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta held a conference in Singapore during the 11th Shangri-La Dialogue edition. The main purpose

of his speech was to present to the attending representatives the new defense strategy that the USA was implementing. On the occasion, he emphasized Washington's intention to play a greater, deeper and lasting role in the region in order to contribute to prosperity and maintain security, and how the military arrangements in the region would be adjusted to support the reorientation of the US foreign policy. (PANETTA, 2012: 1).

What draws attention in the document is the presentation of the defensive stance that the USA plans to adopt over the coming decades. According to him, by 2020, the navy intends to reposition its troop so as to keep 60% of its forces stationed and operating from the Pacific, leaving the remaining 40% operating from the Atlantic. The same will happen to the Air Force, which will have 60% of its staff relocated to the region. Such a repositioning will happen even with the budget reduction that was already in effect in the United States (PANETTA, 2012: 4).

The naval element assumes, in rebalance, a privileged position. This can be explained by some factors. The first concerns the historical importance of maritime power to the United States; the second, the fact that operations in the Asia-Pacific demand a different type of military organization from that employed in 2001 in Afghanistan and Iraq, which favored ground forces; and finally, the fact that there is an accelerating growth of military squadrons in the Pacific region, which is mainly led by China.

Mearsheimer (2010), for example, in an article directed at an Australian audience, argued that China could pursue regional hegemony in the Asia-Pacific, or at least in the Western Pacific, by creating naval conditions to expel the United States from the region (MEARSHEIMER, 2010: 387-390). In this sense, China would imitate, according to him, the behavior of the United States in the Americas, when it was organized to expel the European powers from the Western Hemisphere in the passage from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries. The imitation would also be due to the fact that China could develop the technological capabilities for naval confrontation, but would not necessarily have to appeal to war, but rather create the geopolitical conditions for different states in the Pacific to accept the Chinese primacy over the USA.

Blumenthal (2012) sees an ongoing long-term strategic competition in the Asia-Pacific, and emphasizes that it has become more evident precisely in the naval aspect (BLUMENTHAL, 2012: 168-171). China is expected to use increasing modernization resources that will lead to the construction of a blue-water navy, which will be developed primarily to defend the maritime lines through which Chinese trade develops. Initially, control of the South China Sea,

the Yellow Sea and the East China Sea will be sought. In a second moment, all activity of the US naval forces would be excluded from China's Economic Exclusivity Zone.

China has a navy inferior to the US navy. However, technological modernization is centered on major weapons systems, and their proper logistical and communications support. The development of missiles, satellites and submarines is designed to emphasize the capabilities of Anti-Access/Area Denial, A2/AD. Conceptually speaking, A2/AD is an update of a concept that is not unheard of in terms of war at sea. The novelty is due to the emphasis on the technological component. Anti-Access is defined as the set of actions that make it difficult for certain military forces to move to a theater of operations. Area Denial affects maneuvering within an operating theater – it is assumed that it has not been possible to prevent invading forces from accessing a particular region, and, from the combat point of view, the logical step is to make it as difficult as possible for them to move and operate freely within the area under conflict.

What concern has begun to be evident among US strategists? A more assertive China, which is rapidly developing the means to challenge US naval superiority, may cause an imbalance in the Asia-Pacific, and may reduce or nullify US primacy in the region. This can happen in a more direct way (the diplomatic use of naval force, or, ultimately, its use in war), or indirectly by provoking a race among several countries in the region to protect themselves from China. Japan, Australia, Vietnam and India (the latter not in the Pacific, but strategically positioned in the Indian Ocean and with a history of conflict with the Chinese) undertake naval modernization that responds to this new geopolitical context, and which may put in check the United States' primacy in the area, something that would have global repercussions.

The US naval response – again, the most obvious military-strategic repositioning element in relation to the Asia-Pacific – occurs on rising waves. In the embryo, there is the development of the concept of Air Sea Battle (ASB), which occurs in parallel to the statements of Obama, Clinton and Panetta explaining the American Pivot. The central idea is to enhance an integrated network capability for deep attacks against opposing forces. Such attacks should lead to the physical destruction and disruption or discontinuity of communications by an opposing group, especially by using cyber resources (in this case, defeating anti-access capabilities at first and area-denial capabilities at a second stage). The concept is a direct response to the A2/AD threat, and has regional and global implications as it begins to be implemented to maintain the projection of the US

naval power in every imaginable theater of operations. However, it focuses on training for the Pacific area operation in terms of preparing and repositioning the US global stance (SILOVE, 2016: 69-74).

To demonstrate the execution of the reorientation, the author explains the beginning of naval repositioning as follows (SILOVE, 2016: 67-69):

- By reviewing the US global stance, the Department of Defense decided to expand the air force base in Guam, the Philippines, so that it could accommodate a rapid reaction force composed of interceptor fighters, bombing planes, refueling planes, military aircraft electronic recognition and interception and detachment of Global Hawk drones. The repositioning of this material is already underway, and started in 2004.

- Between 2009 and 2014, four nuclear attack submarines were repositioned to Guam, and along with other similar warships already operating in the region, 60% of US submersibles are already available in the Pacific. They are SSNs and SSGNs, that is, general purpose atomic submarines capable of launching cruise missiles.

- Four coastal combat ships (LCS) have been relocated to Singapore, and since 2010 there has been an additional aircraft carrier in the Pacific.

Also according to Silove, US engagement with its allies and partners in the Pacific occurs as follows:

- Strengthening of bilateral links and joint operations with key allies, notably Japan, Australia and the Philippines;
- Stimulus for allies and partners to develop partnerships and cooperate to maintain interoperability between their military devices.

The focus on bilateral links and the stimulation of links between partners and allies follow the realistic logic of external balancing. In this case, by bringing together a number of countries that aim to balance China's rise, the USA can gain access to the combined resources of various partners, lowering its own costs and keeping the Chinese in a position of naval inferiority. Politically, a security structure is built consisting of a federated network of countries that have common interests in the Pacific. Historically, it is the abandonment of the outdated Cold War concept of defense, in which the United States was the center of alliances and all partners communicated primarily with it, in a model that can be exemplified by the image of bicycle wheel spokes, built to depend on a central axis. Finally, by strengthening these relationships, there is a demonstration that China's ability to weaken these nations will not increase over time.

Still within the naval aspect of the Pivot, it is interesting to note that the United States has led the world's largest maritime warfare exercise in recent years, and that has happened in the Pacific. It is the RIMPAC, Rim of the Pacific Exercise, and 26 nations participate in it. Most of them are from the Pacific, but not necessarily from Asia, such as Chile and the United States itself, for instance. In recent years, there has been a growing participation of non-Pacific countries, such as Italy and Germany. In 2016, China was officially invited to participate in the exercise, and responded positively, which is part of the logic of diplomatic use of military fleets in time of peace.

The fact that the United States has been leading the RIMPAC and has invited a number of non-Asia-Pacific region players may be in accordance with an idea advocated by Kurt Campbell: the USA must integrate other allies and partners into the Pivot exercise process, such as the European NATO countries.

In doing so, it signals that in its grand global strategy, it does not intend to abandon existing commitments in favor of an exclusive attention toward the Pacific, also strengthening its position again by bringing in other forces that are interested in the stability of the region (CAMPBELL, 2016).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This paper aimed to discuss the American Pivot to the Asia-Pacific, from the conceptual understanding of the grand strategy employed by the United States in this process. The focus was on the naval element due to its strategic importance in the US planning for the region.

Some partial conclusions that may guide further research and studies on the problem are presented at the end of this text.

First, there is the fact that the USA accepts China's rise within certain parameters, and sees as inevitable the shift of political, economic and military power to the Asia-Pacific. Nevertheless, it wants to use its hegemony position on the international scene to participate and maintain its primacy position to some extent.

At a second moment, US action is taken not to antagonize China, at the same time maintaining articulate responsiveness in the event of a deterioration of relations in the region. For this purpose, it reinforces the traditional alliance with Japan and Australia, and seeks to attract India to its diplomatic tool.

In the literature examined, as well as in the documents analyzed, the emergent idea is that the USA is in strategic competition with China. However, the existing evidence does not point to a containment of the same nature of

what was done with the USSR or, more recently, with Iran. That is, there is not a major strategy used to isolate China in the international system so far, precisely because there would be great economic consequences for a number of US allies in every continent, and even for the Americans themselves.

It should be borne in mind that there is a more pessimistic – though not necessarily fatalistic – literature that sees the collision between the USA and China as inevitable, and that this may already be happening indirectly involving Beijing and allied countries and partners, such as Japan, the Philippines and Vietnam. This worldview probably expresses the position of sectors within academia and the US government, and it is consistent with one of the discussions presented about the meaning of the concept of grand strategy: there is a rational calculation component, an assessment of the external scenario, a consideration of a country's internal situation and the values, biases, and influence of historical experience that affect decision-makers' worldviews.

Even taking into account the argument that there is no doctrine of containment being executed against China at this time, the fact is that there is an encirclement being built around that country, and that it has the engaged support both of an economic power such as Japan and of strategically well-situated countries such as Vietnam or Australia; besides, this encirclement seeks to add India, the other major power candidate in the future. Such encirclement seeks, at a minimum, to achieve some sort of control and moderation over Beijing's geopolitical behavior, which is difficult, if not impossible, to predict.

Thirdly, an analysis centered on the naval issue was performed. This is a resource of classic United States' power – and in which America was a pioneer in terms of formulating strategic and ideological conceptions as well as in the developing operational doctrines (centrality of aircraft carriers from World War II and the more recent ASB doctrine). It is worth mentioning that in the maritime component, the United States aggregates the aerospace sector. In recent years, there has been news of Chinese advances in building anti-satellite weapons, implementing its own space program, and developing fifth-generation fighters and a whole family of cruise and hypersonic missiles designed to counteract numerical superiority of US airfield vessels.

Last but not least: the US Pacific strategy takes into account the modernization and expansion of the naval arsenals of allied countries such as Australia and Japan, and of a widely courted partner country, India. If such countries do not feel that the USA will maintain its defense and security commitments in the Asia-Pacific, the possibility is open for them to implement, alone or in regional agreements, the expansion of their squadrons and their

aerospace industry.

In this case, Washington would have to worry not only about the growth of Chinese forces, but also about the strengthening of its allies' military forces. Japan, for example, could use its technological mastery in electronics, computing, nuclear physics, robotics, satellite launch vehicles, and naval engineering, and build nuclear submarines equipped with ballistic missiles carrying nuclear warheads. The possibility of an arms race would be open in a sector where the US domination was until recently seen as something that could not be disputed. This would undermine the US position in Asia and the Pacific and have repercussions on other oceans and continents.

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