



**Rising Powers Initiative- Sigur Center for Asian Studies  
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**The US "Pivots" Back to Asia. How are the Region's Major Powers Reacting?**

In our [previous Policy Alert](#), we examined Asian reactions to the economic aspects of America's "pivot" back to Asia strategy. Today's Alert looks at what China, India, and Japan are saying about the geopolitical implications of US plans to strengthen its presence in Asia.

**CHINA**

Official commentary specifically on this topic was expressed by the Foreign Ministry spokesperson during a [regular press briefing](#): "In handling Asia-Pacific affairs, one should comply with the basic trend of peace, development and cooperation upheld by regional countries, and respect the diversity and complexity of the region."

Similarly, the press has stressed [China's commitment to peaceful development and coexistence with neighbors](#). Commentaries characterize US intentions as reflecting a "[Cold War mentality](#)" aiming to encircle China, then explain why such plans are likely to fail:

- In general, the entire region is suspicious of US motives. An article in the *People's Daily* says [Asian countries are "unlikely to approve of the US attempt to impose its values on them or the so-called 'leadership' it aspires to exercise in Asia."](#)
- Specific countries such as Australia cannot be counted on either, because [Australia \[is\] currently swaying between China and the US,](#)" says a *Global Times* editorial. Li Hongmei, editor of the *People's Daily Online*, also [cites a former Australian defense official](#) who said the plan "was a very risky move" for his country.
- Economically, strategic encirclement of China is not truly possible because of Chinese economic clout. "[Any country which chooses to be a pawn in the US chess game will lose the opportunity to benefit from China's economy. This will surely make US protection less attractive.](#)"
- China may also retaliate economically at neighboring countries, such as the Philippines, for cooperating militarily with the US. The Philippines is "[walking a very fine line,](#)" warned a *Global Times* editorial that recommended economic "punishment" such as postponing the implementation of investment agreements and decreasing imports from the Philippines. In the meantime, "China should enhance cooperation with countries like Malaysia and Indonesia, allowing them to benefit more from the Philippine vacuum."

For reactions by Chinese netizens, the Dutch nonprofit foundation *Global Voices* has a report [here](#).

**INDIA**

Across the board, commentary in India is welcoming of America's plan to strengthen its presence in Asia, and sees this renewed attention on the region as a chance for India to assert its strategic role.

- "[The American push for an open and inclusive definition of the Asia-Pacific community converges with Indian interests](#)," said an editorial in *The Times of India*. "If East Asia is where the action is, then Indian diplomacy needs to focus here and make New Delhi a significant player in the region. India shares centuries-old cultural and civilisational links with East Asia which deserve to be leveraged."
- "[Southeast Asian and Pacific Rim countries are welcoming a larger US presence in defining a new century's security template](#). Framing the developments is China's rise, which has determined Washington's toughening tone," says an *Indian Express* editorial. "Delhi ought to wake up to this new world order and utilise the opportunities thrown up to dynamically involve itself in shaping the new Asian security order."

It is unclear exactly what kind of strategic role India can and should play, however.

- India is "[not yet big enough to be treated as a viable balancing partner by smaller countries](#)" in the region, says the *Hindustan Times*. Rather than trying to contain China, the editorial writes, "the game is about trying to preserve sufficient autonomy of action for other Asian countries that they can resist when Beijing lapses into aggressive or bullying behavior."
- Anita Inder Singh of the Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution in New Delhi also cautions that "[India cannot take the US for granted](#)" because the reality of America's fiscal constraints, coupled with the US troop withdrawals from Afghanistan, mean that India should strengthen its own military capacities so that it can play a role in maintaining regional stability.
- On the other hand, Nitin Pai, founder of a strongly nationalistic strategic think tank in India, wrote in a *Business Standard* op-ed that "[India today is in a position to be a swing power](#)." In his confident outlook, Pai further commented that "China today is at its most vulnerable since the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989," in all matters from geopolitics to economics and internal security.

## JAPAN

Japanese press focused on the [speech](#) President Obama delivered last Thursday in Australia securing an agreement to station as many as 2,500 U.S. Marines in Darwin and announcing that the U.S. would expand its role in the Asia-Pacific for the long term.

Citing fears of a fast-growing China with expanding military and economic power, commentators welcomed the expanded U.S. role:

- The *Daily Yomiuri* noted that "U.S. military forces stationed in Okinawa Prefecture and South Korea are within range of China's ballistic missiles. [Securing a U.S. military foothold outside the range of those missiles is indispensable to strengthening deterrence](#)." For this reason, "the new U.S. strategy is welcome as it will contribute to the region's stability and prosperity. The role of the Japan-U.S. alliance is certain to become more important."
- Obama's announcement "does not mean that U.S. bases in Japan are any less important," declared the *Asahi Shimbun*. "The Japan-U.S. alliance remains the linchpin of the American forward presence in Asia. But [new geostrategic realities have necessitated adjustments in the U.S. military posture](#)." As for China, stated the *Asahi*, "it has only itself to blame. By throwing around its increasing weight over the last couple of years, China has unnerved much of East Asia," thereby driving U.S. friends and allies even more firmly into Washington's arms.

*POLICY ALERTS of the Rising Powers Initiative inform U.S. policymakers and media professionals of the ongoing debates in China, India, Japan and Russia on current issues and events relevant to American foreign policy. The Rising Powers Initiative includes a research project that identifies and tracks the worldviews of major and aspiring powers in Asia and Eurasia. This project is supported by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.*

*For further information and analysis, visit the project website at <http://www.gwu.edu/risingpowers> and the RPI blog at <http://risingpowers.wordpress.com>.*

## Rising Powers Initiative

Sigur Center for Asian Studies  
The Elliott School of International Affairs

1957 E St., NW, Suite 503  
Washington, D.C. 20052



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