

The Obama Administration's Asia-Pacific Strategy

Wu Xinbo

After President Obama took office, he started adjusting the U.S. global strategy, bringing two wars to a close and increasing attention and investment in the Asia-Pacific region. After three years of planning and implementation, the new U.S. Asia-Pacific strategy has taken its initial shape, and it has exerted and will continue to exert major influence on its relations with Asia, especially East Asia.

I. The Basic Cognizance: The Asia-Pacific and the United States

From the very beginning, the Obama administration embraced the importance of the Asia-Pacific region. President Obama said that the United States has a stake in the future of the region, because what happened there has a direct impact on U.S. domestic life. Secretary of State Clinton claimed, "It is increasingly clear that the strategic and economic center of gravity of the world in the 21st century will be the Asia-Pacific region."

The Obama administration believes that to the United States, the Asia-Pacific community provides economic opportunities

Wu Xinbo is Professor at Center for American Studies, Fudan University.

while also posing challenges. The Asia-Pacific is the most dynamic region in the world economy. U.S. exports to the Asia-Pacific grew faster than its exports to all other regions. Obama planned to double U.S. exports in five years, and he mainly pinned his hope on the Asia-Pacific region, particularly China. But in terms of security, the Obama administration sees more challenges. The rapid rise of new regional powers such as China and India are triggering unprecedented changes in the way that power is defined and distributed in Asia. Alongside these changes there has been increases in non-traditional threats such as violent extremism, the proliferation of nuclear and missile technologies, competition for scarce resources and devastating natural disasters, and unparalleled rates of military modernization. Most saliently, the development of some of the world's most advanced military capabilities make some countries – namely China – capable of challenging the United States' previously unchallenged access to the global commons.

The Obama administration has realized that the Bush administration's pursuit of narrow policy objectives in Asia was mistaken, but due to two wars and a financial crisis, Asian countries increasingly question whether the United States has the will to actively participate in Asian regional affairs, whether the United States can fulfill its security commitment to its allies, and whether in the long run it has the ability to deploy the necessary resources to maintain regional security. These Asian countries' worries are not groundless or incidental. The changes in Asia, especially in East Asia, the alienation of the United States and Southeast Asia caused by U.S. policy failures during the Bush era and the overall decline of U.S. power, all contribute to the marginalization of the United States in the political and economic affairs of the Asia-Pacific region.

Based on the above cognizance, the Obama administration is aware of its need to increase investment in the Asia-Pacific region

and play a leadership role in regional affairs. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton highlighted that one of the most important missions of the U.S. statecraft in the next decade will be to substantially increase its inputs in diplomatic, economic, strategic and other fields in the Asia-Pacific region. With the end of the war in Iraq and the reduced military operations in Afghanistan, the United States can put more resources into the Asia-Pacific region. On the other hand, the Obama administration believes that the challenges faced by the Asia-Pacific region — from ensuring freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, to dealing with North Korea's provocations and proliferation activities, and to promoting balanced and inclusive economic growth — are all calling for U.S. leadership. The Obama administration feels that it is necessary to strengthen participation as well as active leadership in the region.

In order to strengthen the participation of the United States in the Asia-Pacific affairs, the Obama administration has advocated carrying out “Forward-Deployed Diplomacy,” a policy that involves deploying diplomatic resources in every country and every corner of the Asia-Pacific region. Based on the changes of the situation, the Obama administration has put forward a series of important principles to be followed by the United States in Asian affairs:

(1) The contacts between the U.S. and Asia should be based on the alliance system and bilateral partnerships. In addition to maintaining and developing its relations with traditional allies, the United States should also strengthen its relationship with other key players, including India, China, Indonesia, and Vietnam.

(2) Setting a common agenda together with other countries in the region. Such an agenda includes: dealing with nuclear proliferation, territorial disputes, and the arms race in the field of security; reducing barriers to trade and investment, increasing

market transparency, and promoting a more balanced, inclusive and sustainable economic growth mode in economic relations; and protecting human rights and promoting open society politically.

(3) Establishing an effective regional mechanism. Such a regional mechanism should not be just for the sake of dialogue, but must be directed towards specific actions and results.

(4) Promoting flexibility and creativity in multilateral cooperation. Efforts should be made to actively promote informal arrangements to specific problems, such as the six-party talks on Korean nuclear issues, the U.S.-Japan-Australia Trilateral Strategic Dialogue, etc. and to support sub-regional cooperation mechanisms, such as the U.S.-ASEAN Partnership Program, and the U.S.-ASEAN trade and the investment framework agreement.

(5) Identifying key regional mechanisms. These mechanisms should include all key stakeholders, such as the East Asia Summit at the political level, APEC at the economic level, and ASEAN Regional Forum at the security level.

II. The Asia-Pacific Strategic Framework

When East Asia and the United States are undergoing major changes, the Obama administration's Asia-Pacific strategic objectives have been to maintain active participation and leadership from the United States in regional affairs so as to better safeguard the interests of the United States. To this end, the Obama administration is proposing to establish a more vibrant and long-lasting trans-Pacific system, and to shape a more mature security and economic structure.

In the view of the Obama administration, such a security and economic structure should fully reflect the basic principles of the United States' regional security and economic policies. In

terms of security, free and open commercial activities, peaceful settlement of disputes, and just international order must be maintained. Such order stresses the rights and obligations of states, faithfulness to the rule of law, and unhindered access to global commons by all the countries. In the economic field, rules based on open, free, transparent and equitable economic order, Asia-Pacific economic cooperation and integration, balanced, inclusive and environmentally sustainable economic growth, and high-standards and broad-based free trade agreements must be established. Under these security and economic principles, the concept of “global commons” is worth noting. In view of the development of China’s military capabilities, China has the potential to challenge and constrain the ability of the United States to intervene and lead regional security, an ability that the U.S. has long taken for granted. The Obama administration put forward and stressed the concept of global commons and emphasized that all countries have the rights to enter the global commons without interference, though the U.S. only pursued this strategy to ensure its own discursive advantage and establish the traffic rules under a U.S.-dominated “global commons.” In addition, the so-called “high-standard, broad-based” free trade agreements are exactly the Trans-Pacific strategic economic partner of the Relationship Agreement (TPP) which the Obama administration is actively promoting, and the U.S. wants to use it to reflect its requirements on labor rights, environmental protection, intellectual property protection and others field. It also wants to make it a model for APEC to advance Asia-Pacific

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Free Trade Area in the future.

Inheriting the traditional Asia-Pacific strategy of the past, while making new adjustment according to the new situation, the Obama administration has formed the following Asia-Pacific strategic framework. First, to deepen and update relations with the allies; second, to expand contacts with the increasingly important regional partners such as India, Indonesia, Vietnam, Singapore and others; third, to establish a relationship with China that is predictable, stable and comprehensive; fourth, to participate in and foster regional multilateral framework; fifth, to pursue a confident and positive trade and economic policy; sixth, to create a wider range of military presences; and seventh, to promote democracy and human rights.

There are two characteristics when the Obama administration deepens and updates its relations with allies. First, emphasis is put on promoting allies' capacity building. For example, it is developing with Japan the next generation of missile defense system, it is developing cyberspace programs with Australia, it strengthens counter-proliferation cooperation with South Korea, and it enhances the abilities of Thailand and the Philippines to combat violent extremism. Second, it attaches importance to its security relationship with Australia. If the Clinton administration and the Bush administration attached great importance to the U.S.-Japan alliance after the Cold War era, then the Obama administration makes efforts to strengthen the U.S.-Australia alliance. This is because the delayed progress in the relocation of U.S. forces in Japan's Okinawa has restricted the U.S.-Japan alliance, and it needs to have a new Asia-Pacific security layout.

The United States' Asia policy was for a long time based on bilateral relations with its allies. But with the rise of Asian powers such as China and India and the growth of medium-sized countries such as Indonesia and Vietnam, it is an indisputable fact that the U.S. traditional allies' weight in regional affairs

is shrinking. China, India and other countries are playing a crucial role either in responding to the financial crisis, or in resolving regional problems (such as the North Korean nuclear issue), or promoting global governance. In addition to maintaining relations within the traditional alliance, the Obama administration is attaching importance to partnerships with the region's emerging forces, which is a reaction to the changes in Asia's political, economic and security pattern. It shows the practical side of its diplomatic thinking, but also has a distinctive geopolitical consideration.

In the Obama administration's efforts to develop partnerships, India, Indonesia and Vietnam are three important target countries. Substantial improvements and developments in U.S. relations with India began when George W. Bush was in power, and the trend has only continued since Obama took power. Obama said, "India is a trusted global power, and U.S. relations with India will reshape the international relations in Asia and around the world in the 21st century." The United States believes that the U.S.-India partnership in Asia is faced with historical opportunities in several areas, namely Asian as well as global security and prosperity and economic growth in India. On the Asian level, an important consideration in U.S. policy towards India is to balance and contain China's growing strength and influence in Asia. At this point, the Obama administration has basically followed the Bush administration's policy thinking towards India – it has actively developed military cooperation with India and encouraged India to play a greater role in the affairs of the East Asian region. As the world's largest Islamic country, the number one country in ASEAN and a member of the Group of Twenty, Indonesia is also an emerging Asian country that the Obama administration attaches great importance to. By developing its relations with Indonesia, the Obama administration hopes that it can improve its relations

with the Islamic world, fight against terrorism and extremism in Southeast Asia, and influence ASEAN's internal development and external relations, such as ASEAN's role in East Asian cooperation and ASEAN relations with China. The progress of U.S.-Vietnam relations has also been striking. In March 2010, the United States and Vietnam signed a memorandum of understanding on civilian nuclear energy cooperation. During the ASEAN Regional Forum meeting in July of the same year, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton openly supported the Vietnamese in the South China Sea issue, clearly demonstrating that the attitude of the United States is to actively intervene in the South China Sea dispute. In August, the two sides held their first defense dialogue and joint military exercises. In September 2011, the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding on defense cooperation, which stipulated that both sides ensure safety at sea and exchange information for the maintenance of regional security. It is regarded as a sign of upgrading military exchanges between the two countries. In addition, the United States and Vietnam are also actively exploring the establishment of a "strategic partnership."

In the Obama administration's Asia-Pacific strategy, China is one of the "key players" which the United States seeks to develop partnerships, but it shows very clearly the double-dealing in its China policy. On the one hand, the Asian regional stability, U.S. and global economic recovery and the advance of global governance require that China play an active and constructive role, and the United States hopes to deepen and expand cooperation with China. On the other hand, deeply influenced by traditional realist thinking, the Obama administration feels uneasy about the rapid rise of Chinese power and its expanding influence in Asia, and it therefore actively seeks to counterbalance China. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell even put forward a new guideline

for the United States' policy toward China in early 2011, called for the policy to be "reality-based, focusing on results, to be faithful to our principles and interests." The essence of this new guideline is that U.S. should not have any illusion about relations between the two countries, that contacts with China should not be made just for the sake of contacts, that the U.S. should actively pursue its policy goals, and that it should not try to improve relations with China at the expense of core principles of the United States (as on human rights issues) and interests (as on arms sales to Taiwan). Chinese President Hu Jintao's visit to the U.S. in early 2011 was conducive to stabilizing the Sino-U.S. relations, but the Obama administration is still showing the strong conservative and negative side of its thinking toward China, and constantly taking balancing moves against China.

There are two major features of the Obama administration's policy of participating and fostering the regional multilateral framework, namely, to focus on security mechanisms and to shape the agenda for these mechanisms. The United States participated in the first meeting of the ASEAN Defense Ministers in October 2010 and set five priority areas for cooperation: to promote the humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, maritime security, military medicine, anti-terrorism and peacekeeping operations. In July 2009, by joining the "Southeast Asian Friendship and Cooperation Treaty" the United States became eligible to participate in the East Asia Summit. In October 2010, the United States for the first time participated in the East Asia Summit and expressed hope that the summit would become a forum to discuss urgent strategic and political

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issues, such as nuclear non-proliferation, maritime security, climate change, and other issues. In November 2011, President Obama attended the East Asia Summit, and again called for the summit to expand the scope of discussion, focusing on the strategic and security challenges facing the region. At the summit, Obama highlighted three issues — maritime security, nuclear nonproliferation, and disaster response and humanitarian relief, pushing the summit to become a strategic security forum. The United States also cooperates with ASEAN to reform the organization's Regional Forum, enhance its mobility, and keep it more focused on cross-border and non-traditional security challenges. The United States has two motives in promoting regional security mechanism: to make use of these mechanisms in dealing with the U.S. security concerns, and to shape the regional security order and develop it in a direction favorable to the United States.

In the area of economic policy, because the unparalleled importance of the Asia-Pacific region to the U.S. economy, the Obama administration is committed to promoting the openness of trade and economy of the region. To the Obama administration, the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership Agreement is the most important economic policy instrument. After joining the TPP negotiations in 2009, the United States has consistently tried to make it a free trade arrangement covering widest Asia-Pacific region and setting high standards. In November 2011, Obama chose Hawaii APEC summit to announce that it had reached the TPP basic framework with the countries concerned, in order to highlight the importance the United States attaches to the TPP. The countries participating in the basic framework negotiations planned to finish the legal text of the Agreement in 2012. In the eyes of the Obama administration, the TPP could bring about the following important interests for the United States. First of all, the United States hopes that the agreement

will greatly promote its exports to the region. Washington has tried to include intellectual property protection, labor and environmental protection standards in the TPP talks, so as to advance further the U.S.' competitive edge and push forward U.S. accession to the markets of other countries. At the time when the TPP treaty framework was worked out, President Obama frankly stated that the treaty would help the United States achieve its goal of doubling exports, providing millions of job opportunities. Secondly, the United States wishes to check the development of East Asia cooperation and to revitalize cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region. An increasing East Asian economic cooperation has made the United States feel uneasy not only about the weakening of its economic ties with East Asia, but also about China emerging as the regional economic centre. As a result, the U.S. influence in regional affairs will be weakened. Washington's wishful thinking is that, with Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei, Japan and others being in the TPP, the impetus for a stronger East Asian cooperation will be very much diminished, and the American domination of the Asia-Pacific cooperation will be much enhanced.

Under the new security environment, the Obama administration seeks to make U.S. military presence in the region more flexible in operation, more reasonable in its geographical distribution and more sustainable in politics. Proceeding from this, the United States intends to make the following adjustments to its military presence. Firstly, to enhance its deterrence capabilities in dealing with "conflicts and threats," and to ensure the U.S. success through the performance of its military capability, military bases and operational concepts when the U.S.' accession and free movement is challenged. For this purpose, the United States works hard to strengthen, together with its allies, missile defense capabilities, redistribute its military resources and forces (for instance, moving its forces

from Okinawa to a second island-chain), consolidate its military facilities and to improve its remote intelligence, reconnaissance and surveillance capacity. Secondly, the United States strives to increase its military presence in Southeast Asia and in the Indian Ocean. For a long time, the United States focused its regional military force in Northeast Asia to cope with any military conflicts on the Korean Peninsula and in the Taiwan Straits. Now with the new security situation, the United States has shifted its focus to Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean. For this purpose, the United States announced that it would deploy littoral combat ships in Singapore, to station Marine Corps in Australia, to enlarge its military presence in the Philippines and to conduct operations frequently and seamlessly with its allies in Southeast Asia including more joint military trainings and new joint patrols and exercises.

In its promotion of human rights and democracy, the Obama administration focuses on China, Vietnam, Myanmar and the DPRK, although its tactics differ in different countries. In the beginning, Washington played down the difference on human rights and democracy issues with China and mainly focused on freedom of information. However, starting in 2011, its position became much more intense and hard. It has continually accused and attacked China on human rights issues, and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton even launched attacks on the human rights issues during the Third round of strategic and economic dialogues between China and the United States in May 2011. The United States uses the development of its strategic partnership with Vietnam as a bait to induce it to protect human rights and promote political freedom. Through both contacts and restraints, the U.S. government forces the Myanmar government to seek reconciliation with Aung San Suu Kyi, to release political prisoners and to promote political freedom and human rights. In North Korea, human rights

issues tend to be secondary to security concerns, but human rights still factor into U.S. policy formation.

III. Main Features of the U.S. Asia-Pacific Strategy

Compared with the previous administration, the Obama administration's strategy for the Asia-Pacific region, in both concepts and practice, has the following prominent features:

1. A broader vision on the Asia-Pacific

Traditionally, the U.S. perspective on Asia-Pacific focused primarily on East Asia and the Western Pacific region, while Central Asia, South and West Asia were not included. With the changing balance of force in Asia, the Bush administration started to touch upon Central Asia and South Asia in U.S. policies. The Obama administration included in clear-cut terms the South Asian subcontinent into its Asia-Pacific strategy, linking the security situation in the Indian Ocean with that of Western Pacific. The Defense Strategic Guidance published by the U.S. Department of Defense in January 2012 states that "U.S. economic and security interests are inextricably linked to developments in the arc extending from the Western Pacific and East Asia into the Indian Ocean region and South Asia".

2. A strong sense of an overall "layout"

Although the Obama administration has not refused to deal with specific challenges in the region, its clear purpose is to shape a new regional structure. By creating a new regional security and economic structure, the Obama administration wants to put U.S. relations with the region on a more solid basis and enhance U.S. dominance in the region while China is rising.

3. To change the "wheel and spokes" shaped regional policy framework into a network structure

The traditional security structure, which looked like "wheel and spokes," was built on a regional alliance with the United

States serving as the pivot. With a rapidly rising China, a relatively declining America, and a stagnated Japan, the “wheel and spokes” structure cannot function properly in dealing with the situation in the Asia-Pacific region. On the other hand, Washington has to attach importance to the potential and realistic geopolitical roles of some countries in the region, whose power and influence are increasing. The Obama administration treats these countries as important partners in the Asia-Pacific sphere, and actively develops cooperation with them in political, security and economic fields. As a result, the policy structure of the United States in Asia-Pacific is no longer based on bilateral relations between the U.S. and its allies. It also includes interconnection and coordination among allies and partners, thus forming a security structure based on an intertwined pattern.

4. To make multiple uses of diplomacy, economy and security in a coordinated way

In its designing as well as implementation, the U.S. Asia-Pacific strategy is focusing on the overall structure of diplomacy, economy and security issues. The United States makes all diplomatic efforts to develop partnerships with India, Indonesia, Vietnam and other countries. Economically, the United States actively promotes the TPP to create a new regional economic framework. On security issues, the United States makes a big deal out of the South China Sea issue, and turns the East Asia Summit into a multilateral security platform. All these approaches taken by the U.S. in its Asia-Pacific policy are complementary: to develop the partnership helps the United States build a new regional economic and security architecture; to create a new regional economic framework is in the interests of the United States to win over some countries in the region and to consolidate its regional security arrangements; and the South China Sea issue and the East Asia Summit can be used

by the U.S. to get itself more involved in the security affairs in the region and win over some Southeast Asian countries. All the above-mentioned means also serve the purpose of containing a rising China, which is a major aspect of Washington's strategy.

5. To take the Southeast Asia as the centre of gravity

In the post-Cold War era, the two previous U.S. administrations prioritized their policies mainly on Northeast Asia, with emphasis on strengthening relations with Japan and South Korea, and actively engaging with the Korean Peninsula issue. Feeling uneasy due to China's growing relations with Southeast Asian countries in the first decade of the 21st century as well as China's expanding influence in the region, and due to the Bush administration's neglect of Southeast Asia, the Obama administration is determined to refocus its strategy in Asia and Pacific. During the past few years, the United States joined the East Asia Summit, signed the friendship and cooperation treaty with Southeast Asian countries, initiated the U.S.-ASEAN summit, pushed forward the Lower Mekong Action Plan, stressed the development of partnership with Vietnam and Indonesia, unfroze relations with Myanmar, meddled in the South China Sea issue, and deployed Littoral Combat Ships in Singapore. By doing so, the current administration has valued Southeast Asia and has taken most actions in the region since the end of the Vietnam War. U.S. meddling in the South China Sea issue makes people see more clearly the multi-purposes of the Obama administration in its Asia-Pacific policy: to win over some Southeast Asian countries, to drive a wedge between China and these countries, and to contain activities of the Chinese navy in the South China Sea and so on.

6. To change the U.S. strategic posture toward China

In working out their Asia-Pacific strategies, all U.S. administrations since the end of the Cold War have had aspects directed against China. The Clinton administration

focused on precautionary strategy towards China, the Bush administration carried out a “hedging” strategy, and the Obama administration executed a “balancing” strategy. Conceptually speaking, the strategy of “balancing” against China conforms to the precautionary strategy and the “hedging” strategy, however, “balancing” against China is designed against China in a more focused way.

7. To set store on rule-making

The 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance indicates that “working closely with our network of allies and partners, we will continue to promote a rules-based international order that ensures underlying stability and encourages the peaceful rise of new powers, economic dynamism, and constructive defense cooperation”. The Obama administration believes that under the circumstance of major changes in the balance of force in Asia and Pacific it must gain control over the rules of the game to ensure its dominant regional position. What’s more it is also a show of “soft power” and “smart power” of a country. These rules include free and open commercial activities, peaceful settlement of disputes, all countries’ unhindered access to global commons such as the air, outer space and sea, the openness, freedom, transparency and fairness of the economic order, etc. Washington works hard, together with its allies, to make these rules fully apparent in a new regional economic and security structure.

IV. The Prospects

The Obama administration, by pursuing its Asia-Pacific strategy in the past three years, has achieved some important progress. U.S. influence in the region is increasing. Washington’s relations with some countries in the region have been strengthened, and certain troubles have been created to China’s regional policy and

also in China's relations with some neighbors. Despite all these gains, the Obama administration still faces many uncertainties and constraints in its Asia-Pacific policy.

1. Change of personnel factors

Policies vary from person to person, and changes of the ruling teams are always accompanied by significant adjustments of the foreign policy. These adjustments include the focus of policy and allocation of resources. Due to the rising status of the Asia-Pacific region in the world's political and economic landscape, it is a general trend that the U.S. attaches importance to the Asia-Pacific region. President Obama pays great attention to this region, as does his foreign policy team. But it is not certain that such personnel structure will continue. If President Obama cannot win reelection, will the next president pay the same attention to the region as his or her predecessor? Even if President Obama holds onto his seat in the White House, it is still not certain whether a newly-formed foreign policy team will push forward the U.S. Asia-Pacific strategy with the same concepts and efforts as Obama does.

2. Change of priority in the U.S. foreign policy agenda

The post-Cold War international situation is full of uncertainty, and sudden changes tend to disrupt the established international political agenda, forcing the United States to prioritize. Look at the current situation: the evolving situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Iranian nuclear issue, and the Syrian situation are all tipping points which might force the United States to get itself more involved. There are also uncertainties existing due to the European debt crisis and the future U.S.-Russia relations.

3. The future of the U.S. economy

The outbreak of the financial and economic crisis in 2008 was the most serious crisis experienced by the United States since the 1930s. It not only brought about severe blows to the U.S. economy, but also exposed deep-rooted structural problems in

American society, indicating forthcoming economic development uncertainties in the United States. Confronting a relative decline of its overall might, the United States, in pursuance of its foreign policy and security strategies, is challenged by contradictions of its hegemonic ambition.

4. Uncertain effects of the TPP

At present, the three major economies in East Asia – Japan, China, and South Korea – have all finalized their respective free trade arrangements with the ASEAN countries, and the “10+1” economic cooperation framework has been established. The arrangements of trilateral free trade zone among China, Japan and South Korea as well as the bilateral free trade zone between China and South Korea have been put on the agenda. Although from time to time there are ups and downs in the political and security relations among three countries, it is imperative for the three countries to build up a closer economic relationship, especially in view of China being the number one trading partner to Japan and South Korea. Cooperation among China, Japan, and South Korea will make cooperation in East Asia more substantive since these three countries have huge economic strength and large bilateral trade volume. Therefore, the cooperation in East Asia is expected to move forward with its own pace, although the TPP came in abruptly in the region. In addition, China has been the primary engine and pivot in the economic development in Asia and East Asia in particular. It would be rather difficult for these countries to become estranged from China. So long as its economic growth maintains good momentum, China will keep its unshakable position in Asia’s economy.

5. Limitation of security cards

The United States has its advantage in playing security cards in the Asia-Pacific region, and Obama’s Asia-Pacific strategy has been to highlight U.S. strength as a regional balancing factor and security defender. Some countries in the region, out of their

security concerns in recent years, have tightened their security ties with the United States. However, such a pattern of depending on China economically while relying on the U.S. on security matters is not possible in the long-term. The U.S. attempt to turn the East Asia Summit into a regional security mechanism has encountered resistance from some Asian countries, since such a move greatly weakens the function of the East Asia Summit as a strategic forum for East Asia cooperation. On the South China Sea issue, the United States could fish for certain diplomatic and security benefits from disputes between China and some Southeast Asian countries, however the United States, after all, is not a claimant in the South China Sea, so it is difficult for the U.S. to get itself directly involved in the South China Sea dispute. So long as China does not make strategic errors, the U.S. can only play its role on the side on the South China Sea issue.

In summary, compared with the Bush administration, the Obama administration has a more in-depth understanding of the situation in the Asia-Pacific region. As a result, they have a more systematic and focused Asia-Pacific strategy. However, because of its policy inertia and narrow-minded consideration of interests, there are three prominent mistaken ideas in the U.S. Asia-Pacific strategy and guidelines. Firstly, the United States is still complacent about its leading role in the region, and it fails to realize that more and more Asian countries treat the U.S. as a partner in regional affairs. Secondly, the United States still refuses to recognize the integration trend in East Asia, and tries hard to check the East Asian cooperation in its policy designing. Thirdly, the United States still finds it hard to free itself from a Cold-War mentality, and its security policies still indulge in geo-politics, group politics and military security. All these mistaken ideas make its Asia-Pacific policies lagging behind the real development in the region and restrain the role of the United States in Asia-Pacific affairs. 