

# PERSPECTIVE

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## **America's Emerging Choices in Asia**

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- A critical foreign policy debate is emerging in the 2016 American presidential election over the relative success of U.S. foreign policy in Asia and how Washington should best manage its regional and global interests when a new president assumes office in January 2017.
- Four key issues or choices and how the U.S. responds to them must constitute the basis for Asian order-building during the next presidential term of office: (1) the re-balancing strategy's relative success or failure; (2) Washington's re-assessment of traditional asymmetrical security relationships in the Asia-Pacific; (3) the intensification of regional flashpoints; and (4) U.S. policy-makers' navigation of American global and regional security interests and developments.
- The idea of security 'partnership' may appeal to a new American presidential administration with regard to complementing traditional Asia-Pacific security alliances given its emphasis on issue-specific collaboration.
- The Korean peninsula, the South China Sea and possibly Taiwan will constitute the greatest tests for U.S. and allied/partner security cooperation over the near-term, and Sino-Russian cooperation raises the potential for an 'all Eurasian' geopolitical rivalry between China and Russia versus the West.
- The absence of sufficiently strong U.S. leadership in the Asia-Pacific security arena will limit the options of ASEAN and other Asian states to leverage against China to safeguard their sovereign interests and to exploit future diplomatic and economic opportunities.

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## INTRODUCTION

A significant debate is emerging during this American presidential election year over the degree to which the United States' security position in Asia is facing a truly historic transition. In part, this is driven by differing views over how effective the so-called U.S. 're-balancing' or 'pivot' strategy has been that the Obama administration has extended toward the region.<sup>1</sup> Change is also portended by prospects for Washington re-assessing its long-standing asymmetrical security ties with friends and allies in the region due to cost and burden-sharing concerns. A third concern is the intensification of regional flashpoints on the Korean peninsula and in both the East and South China Seas. Finally, U.S. policy-makers are increasingly confronted with the need for an appropriate balance between regional and global security. An increasingly nationalist People's Republic of China (PRC) has assumed central importance in all these deliberations. How this debate evolves and what U.S. policy ultimately flows from it will have a substantial impact on the Asia-Pacific region.

However, the United States' future strategic character, in a world undergoing historical structural change, is becoming increasingly blurred. U.S. policy leaders are projecting a broad spectrum of opinions, ranging from supporting different versions of neo-isolationism to redoubling the United States' engagement with the Asia-Pacific and the world-at-large. The most likely outcome is an ambiguous U.S. strategic posture, largely reactive rather than proactive and more vulnerable to strategic shocks; yet still capable of shaping Asia's balance of power.

## 'REBALANCING' VERSUS RETRENCHMENT?

When President Obama spelled out the U.S. 'rebalancing' strategy for Asia to the Australian Parliament in 2011 he designated the following objectives: retaining a strong and flexible military posture in the region; strengthening its formal regional security alliances and cultivating more effective regional security partnerships; strengthening relations with China; invigorating Asia's multilateral institutions with greater American participation; promoting free trade through the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP); and promoting international law and human rights.<sup>2</sup>

Nearly five years later, the reviews are, at best, mixed on how successful the Obama administration has been in implementing these objectives. The administration insists, for

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<sup>1</sup> See Kurt M. Campbell, *The Pivot: The Future of American Statecraft in Asia* (New York and Boston: Twelve, 2016). Campbell was U.S. Deputy Secretary-of-State during President Obama's first term in office (2009-2012) and one of the primary architects of the pivot strategy. For more diverse interpretations, see William T. Tow and Douglas T. Stuart | (eds.), *The New US Strategy towards Asia: Adapting to the American Pivot* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> The White House, 'Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament', November 17, 2011 at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament>

example, that it has ‘prioritised Asia for our [the United States] ‘most advanced military capabilities’. However, Congressionally-mandated budget cuts have combined with the elimination of the traditional ‘two-war’ U.S. force sizing construct to infuse greater uncertainty among America’s Asia-Pacific allies and partners about the durability of U.S. strategic commitments and presence in the region.<sup>3</sup> The White House claims that it has strengthened U.S. treaty alliances with Australia, Japan, the Philippines and South Korea.<sup>4</sup> Japan and South Korea remain worried about future U.S. extended deterrence commitments in Northeast Asia. A more nationalist Philippines president has now assumed power in Manila. U.S.-Thai relations remain stymied over Washington’s displeasure with Thailand’s military junta which American policy-makers perceive as clamping down on democracy and human rights and cozying up to the Chinese military. Moreover, Sino-American ties have worsened in the face of deepening tensions on the Korean peninsula and in the South China Sea.<sup>5</sup>

Overall, the momentum of the administration’s rebalancing strategy in Asia, initially announced with such fanfare, seems to have weakened during its second term in office. This evident dilution is intensifying as Washington comes to terms with the need to reconcile inter-regional economic and security dynamics. The initial promise of Eurasian institutionalism has been sapped by internecine organisational strife in both Europe and Asia. The so-called ‘Brexit’ movement against the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations’ (ASEAN’s) exertions to unite against a rising and increasingly aggressive China over the South China Sea issue are cases-in-point. The American promotion of regional free trade politics in Europe in the form of a proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) has hit a ‘Brexit’ roadblock.<sup>6</sup> Concurrently, the TPP is mired down by anti-trade sentiment hardening as an element of U.S. domestic politics and by substantial Congressional resistance.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Bruce D. Klingner, ‘Rebalancing to the Pacific: Asia Pivot or Divot?’ 2015 Index of U.S. Military Strength, Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 2015 at <http://index.heritage.org/military/2015/important-essays-analysis/rebalancing-pacific-asia-pivot-divot/>. The administration’s more positive assessment is presented in The White House, ‘Fact Sheet: Advancing the Rebalance to Asia and the Pacific’ November 16, 2015 at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/11/16/fact-sheet-advancing-rebalance-asia-and-pacific>.

<sup>4</sup> The White House, ‘Fact Sheet...’

<sup>5</sup> A comprehensive summary of regional apprehensions over the pivot strategy’s future viability is by David E. Sanger, ‘Despite Obama’s Moves, Asian Nations Skeptical of U.S. Commitment’, *The New York Times*, May 23, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Katie Mansfield and Monika Pallenberg, ‘BREXIT CATALYST: Controversial EU/USA trade deal faces FAILURE after referendum’, *Express* (London), June 29, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Kane, ‘Obama’s trade agenda losing critical support as McConnell calls TPP passage unlikely’, *The Washington Post*, July 12, 2016.

## ADJUSTMENTS IN SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS

The Republican Party's presumptive nominee for US president, Donald Trump, has declared that if elected in November 2016 he will call a summit of Washington's Asian allies to discuss a 'rebalancing of financial commitments' and to 'take a fresh look at how we can adopt new strategies for tackling our common challenges'.<sup>8</sup> Trump's proposed 'America First' foreign policy vision embraces the idea of a far more selective application of US military power abroad. In contrast, the presumptive Democratic Party nominee, former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, supports a visibly 'globalist' geopolitical outlook more in line with those adopted by her predecessors over the past half century. American power, she believes, is best projected by the United States maintaining strong alliances buttressed by credible US strategic commitments to maintain extended deterrence and to broaden frameworks of strategic collaboration.<sup>9</sup> Her critics, however, warn that these positions are too interventionist and risk involving the US in future conflicts that could spiral out of control, undermining American power and influence in the process.<sup>10</sup>

Trump's proposed version of allied 'burden-sharing' envisions supporting the possible nuclear armament of Japan and South Korea. Any such development would be widely regarded by most of the American foreign policy establishment as destabilising at a time when North Korea is already proceeding relentlessly to build up its own nuclear weapons capabilities, thus spreading nuclear proliferation in Northeast Asia.<sup>11</sup> The Clinton approach to burden-sharing is to sustain the rebalancing logic by pursuing a coalition of like-minded allies and partners in Southeast Asia to contain Chinese island reclamation efforts in the South China Sea and to reinforce the Arbitration Tribunal in The Hague's decision that opposed such Chinese behaviour.<sup>12</sup>

It should be noted, however, that Washington's current and projected policies are being challenged on various intended beneficiaries of US rebalancing. Thailand's ruling military

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<sup>8</sup> 'Donald J Trump Foreign Policy Speech', April 27, 2016 at

<https://www.donaldjtrump.com/press-releases/donald-j.-trump-foreign-policy-speech>

<sup>9</sup> 'Hillary Clinton Delivers Foreign Policy Speech in San Diego', *NPR*, June 2, 2016 at

<http://www.npr.org/2016/06/02/480487308/hillary-clinton-delivers-foreign-policy-speech-in-san-diego>

<sup>10</sup> Ivan Eland, 'Hillary's Foreign Policy Is Scarier Than Trump's', *The National Interest*, June 17, 2016 at <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/hillarys-foreign-policy-scarier-trumps-16639> and Ted Galen Carpenter, 'It's Time to Prune America's Overgrown Alliance Network', *The National Interest*, June 10, 2016 at <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-skeptics/its-time-prune-americas-overgrown-alliance-network-16544>

<sup>11</sup> 'Trump idea of Japan, South Korea with nuclear weapons is destabilising: White House', *Reuters*, March 30, 2016 at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-nuclear-whitehouse-idUSKCN0WW2B9>

<sup>12</sup> In her key national security address delivered on 2 June 2016, Hillary Clinton noted that '(a)llies provide staging areas for our military, so we can respond quickly to events on the other side of the world... America's network of allies is part of what makes us exceptional. And our allies deliver for us every day...' Transcript: Clinton Delivers Major National Security Address', *The Briefing*, 2 June 2016 at <https://www.hillaryclinton.com/briefing/statements/2016/06/02/transcript-hillary-clinton-delivers-major-national-security-address/>

government, for example, resents what it views as unwarranted American criticism of Thai domestic politics and human rights practices. Newly elected Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte has served notice he wants his country to pursue a more independent foreign policy.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, the United States is still searching for strategic ‘partners’ in Southeast Asia and beyond who are willing and able to work with it on pursuing common security interests without risking alliance entrapment. Recent examples include the upgrading of defence ties with a historically non-aligned India, the provision of modern combat systems to Pakistan as a quid pro quo for Islamabad’s tacit cooperation in counter-terrorist operations conducted by the US in Central and South Asia, an intensifying logistical and strategic relationship with a geographically critical Singapore as part of the US re-balancing strategy’s emphasis on Southeast Asia and the inculcation of Japanese and Australian consultation and collaboration roles in NATO’s out-of-area operations as partners rather than as formal NATO allies.

‘Partnership’, as one type of contemporary security collaboration in the Asia-Pacific, may offer Washington greater levels of strategic flexibility and adaptability than traditional alliance politics there at this time when formal U.S. allies’ material resources are increasingly stretched and when the future of overall regional and international order-building remains unclear. A partnership in international security relations has been defined as a ‘collaboration between states...to take joint advantage of economic opportunities, or to respond to security challenges more effectively than could be achieved in isolation’<sup>14</sup> Partnerships often ‘tend to be informal and entail low commitment costs, rather than being explicitly formalised in a specific alliance treaty that binds the participants to rigid courses of action.’ The partnership concept originates from the business world and tends to privilege ‘functional’ or specific ‘task-oriented’ goals rather than long-term threat neutralisation.<sup>15</sup>

This type of collaboration may appeal to a Trumpian international security perspective of defence burden-sharing or to a Hillary Clinton administration forced to operate within Congressional boundaries of defence spending. Partnership advocates can point to recent developments already underscoring Asia-Pacific defence burden-sharing. These include the Abe government’s recent promotion of Japan as a more ‘normal’ defence actor, South Korea’s decision to host the American deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Defence (THAAD) interceptor missile defence system by the end of 2017, and the implementation of greater defence spending by such potential U.S. regional security partners as Indonesia (increasing its defence spending by 16% in 2015), Vietnam (lifting its defence spending by

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<sup>13</sup> Well informed speculation about how independent Duterte’s foreign policy may become vis-à-vis the U.S.-Philippines alliance is offered by Carmel V. Abao, ‘Engaging Duterte, engaging ourselves’, *Rappler*, July 16, 2016 at <http://www.rappler.com/thought-leaders/139850-engaging-duterte-engaging-ourselves>

<sup>14</sup> Thomas S. Wilkins, ‘Alignment, not alliance – the shifting paradigm of international security cooperation: toward a conceptual taxonomy of alignment’, *Review of International Studies* 38, no. 1 (January 2012), p. 67.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p. 68.

7% over the past year, and India (projected to accelerate its defence spending by approximately 10 % during the 2016-2017 budget year).<sup>16</sup>

## REGIONAL FLASHPOINTS

The incoming U.S. presidential administration will most likely be confronted with a series of exacerbated Asia-Pacific security crises when it assumes office in January 2017. The Korean Peninsula and both the East and South China Sea have now become major regional flashpoints and, after a relatively benign few years, the Taiwan Strait could likewise return to the status of a major regional crisis. Nor will the new administration be able to count on China to work in tandem with Washington to defuse these situations – reversing yet another basic premise of the U.S. re-balancing strategy and reinforcing the stark ideological and geopolitical differences between Beijing and Washington. If left unresolved or unmodified, these flashpoints will spill over to affect Southeast Asian stability and undercut any ASEAN capacity to realise progress in regional order-building.

Events on the Korean peninsula arguably constitute the most volatile regional flashpoint in Asia. Whereas China and the United States can largely control their own differences and exercise substantial influence to avoid being ‘entrapped’ by U.S. allies and partners into directly confronting each other in the region’s maritime littorals, North Korea is an independent and nuclear-armed actor and one well known for playing off rival great powers to underwrite its own survival. At present, it appears North Korean leader Kim Jong-un will be left free to wreak havoc on its neighbours and to project belligerence towards the United States. The opaqueness of North Korean politics ensures that the danger of policy miscalculation by Beijing, Washington or both leading to crisis escalation and war will be a sustained and alarming possibility. If Northeast Asia becomes embroiled in sub-regional conflict, ASEAN’s trading interests and maritime security will be inevitable casualties of any such development.

The Arbitration Tribunal’s negation of China’s ‘nine-dash line’ territorial claim for most of the South China Sea presents Beijing with a complex task.<sup>17</sup> It must now choose between what it deems to be the legitimate pursuit of its national and territorial interests (including saving face) and the avoidance of reputation for flouting an unenforceable but legitimate ruling in international law. Speculation abounds over just how – and to what extent – Beijing will respond.

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<sup>16</sup> David Tweed, ‘How Asia’s Military Spending Growth is Outpacing the World’, *Bloomberg*, June 1, 2016 at <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-05-31/asia-military-spending-rises-in-china-s-shadow-spurring-deals> and *The Times of India*, February 29, 2016 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/budget-2016/union-budget-2016/Union-Budget-2016-Defence-budget-hiked-by-nearly-10/articleshow/51195736.cms>

<sup>17</sup> A text of the Arbitration Tribunal’s ruling can be found at <https://pca-cpa.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/175/2016/07/PH-CN-20160712-Award.pdf>

It is evident, however, that ASEAN claimant-states to various parts of the South China Sea must join the United States and its other regional allies and partners in exercising an intelligent combination of resolve and restraint. This includes the U.S. sustaining its freedom of navigation missions and surveillance missions in the South China Sea's contested waters. Without the U.S. continuing to apply regional leadership by pursuing an active and credible balancing strategy in the South China Sea, the region's indigenous smaller powers are unlikely to exercise sufficient resolve on their own to deter future Chinese provocations or transgressions in the ongoing South China Sea crisis. But the U.S. and its regional allies and partners must also demonstrate resolve in ways that remain as unobtrusive as possible and that are consciously designed not to deliberately embarrass or isolate China in the process.

The January 2016 election of Tsai Ing-wen and her Democratic Progressive Party to lead Taiwan was the latest crossroads in Sino-Taiwanese relations. There is some apprehension by pro-Taiwanese adherents in the U.S. that the American public is less ready to defend Taiwan against a Chinese military attack as China's military power grows and as Beijing presses relentlessly for that island's re-unification with the mainland. A 2014 survey conducted by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs revealed that only 26% of Americans support a U.S. military intervention to defend Taiwan as opposed to 47% who would back American military intervention in the event South Korea was invaded.<sup>18</sup> An assessment by the respected RAND Corporation released in late 2015 concluded that China could seriously test U.S. military superiority in any future showdown over Taiwan and/or the Spratly Islands, while its capacity to project decisive military power along its immediate maritime peripheries is growing steadily.<sup>19</sup>

Early indications are that China is searching for vulnerabilities that could be exploited to at least 'Finlandize' Tsai and the DPP as a prelude to Taiwan's eventual incorporation into the PRC.<sup>20</sup> Mindful of this trend, and of the strategic significance of Taiwan's geography (it sits in the middle of the East China's Sea's key sea lanes of communication and is a critical buffer for Japan against growing Chinese naval power), the U.S. Congress passed a resolution in May 2016 reaffirming the United States' support for the Taiwan Relations Act and for the 'six assurances' that underwrite that legislation's management.<sup>21</sup> China clearly

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<sup>18</sup> Dingding Chen, 'Taiwan's Dilemmas and Challenges After the 2016 Election', *The Diplomat*, January 23, 2016 at <http://thediplomat.com/2016/01/taiwans-dilemmas-and-challenges-after-the-2016-election/>

<sup>19</sup> Eric Heginbotham, et. al., *The U.S.-China Military Scorecard: Forces, Geography and Evolving Balance of Power, 1996-2017* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2015) at [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR392.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR392.html)

<sup>20</sup> Ian Easton, 'Taiwan's Transition is a Strategic Opportunity for the United States', *The Diplomat*, May 17, 2016 at <http://thediplomat.com/2016/05/taiwans-transition-is-a-strategic-opportunity-for-the-united-states/>

<sup>21</sup> See William Lowther, 'US passes resolution that outlines ties with Taiwan', *Taipei Times*, May 18, 2016. The 'six assurances' were extended by President Reagan to Taiwanese officials in 1982. They are: (1) not set a date for termination of arms sales to Taiwan; (2) not alter the terms of the Taiwan Relations Act; (3) not consult with China in advance before making decisions about United States arms sales to Taiwan; (4) not mediate between Taiwan and China; (5) not alter its

interprets any such action as undue interference in its own sovereign affairs. Managing the ‘Congress factor’ as it complicates overall American diplomacy with both the PRC and Taiwan will be a major challenge for the next U.S. administration.

## NAVIGATING U.S. REGIONAL AND GLOBAL SECURITY INTERESTS AND ROLES

The reconciling of U.S. regional and global interests and commitments with increasingly populist trends within both the American and European electorates could well affect Washington’s influence and strategy in the Asia-Pacific. As one observer has presciently noted, America’s next president – Republican or Democrat – is likely to be ‘less internationalist’ at a time when American voters are becoming more skeptical about the value of free trade, immigration and alliance politics. There is a growing ‘sense that the U.S. can afford internationally to scale back – that at a time when America does not face a peer competitor, the “strategic risks” are relatively low and manageable.’<sup>22</sup> China entertains global aspirations but has not yet achieved a global strategic reach commensurate with U.S. capabilities. The threat posed by ISIS and other international terrorist groups is widespread but falls short of a real challenge to America’s existence.

Under such conditions, Washington can become more discriminate in prioritizing its security alliances and partnerships and more demanding over what allies and partners should do to justify continued U.S. commitments to their own defence and survival. Donald Trump views the world as a place where deals can be made or broken based on relative cost at any given time rather than as an international order where alliances exist to guarantee a stable status quo and to deter inter-state conflict.<sup>23</sup> Hillary Clinton insists that as president she would strengthen US alliances and promote free trade. Yet she has also adopted a hard line on Chinese behaviour in the region which could alienate Beijing and lead to allied fears about entrapment in a future Sino-American regional security crisis. She also opposes the TPP deal signed though she promoted the TPP process as U.S. Secretary-of-State. These postures represent a very different logic from the re-balancing strategy’s initial focus on reassuring Asia-Pacific allies and partners that the U.S. would remain an unconditional

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position about the sovereignty of Taiwan which was, that question was one to be decided peacefully by the Chinese themselves, and would not pressure Taiwan to enter into negotiations with China; and (6) not formally recognize Chinese sovereignty over Taiwan.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Trubowitz, ‘Trump or not, Obama’s successor may seek to trim America’s sails internationally’, *blogs.lse.ac.uk*, April 2016 at

[http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/66357/1/\\_lse.ac.uk\\_storage\\_LIBRARY\\_Secondary\\_libfile\\_shared\\_repository\\_Content\\_LSE%20USAPP%20American%20Politics%20and%20Policy%20Blog\\_2016\\_April\\_blogs.lse.ac.uk-Trump%20or%20not%20Obamas%20successor%20may%20seek%20to%20trim%20Americas%20sails%20internationally.pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/66357/1/_lse.ac.uk_storage_LIBRARY_Secondary_libfile_shared_repository_Content_LSE%20USAPP%20American%20Politics%20and%20Policy%20Blog_2016_April_blogs.lse.ac.uk-Trump%20or%20not%20Obamas%20successor%20may%20seek%20to%20trim%20Americas%20sails%20internationally.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> See Max Fisher, ‘I did my best to understand Donald Trump’s foreign policy. Here is what I came up with’, *Vox Policy and Politics*, March 28, 2016 at

<http://www.vox.com/2016/3/28/11318722/trump-foreign-policy> .

regional balancer in the Asia-Pacific while simultaneously pursuing areas of policy collaboration with the Chinese.

Another global security trend that links U.S. international security interests with those it holds in the Asia-Pacific is the recent augmentation of Sino-Russian relations into something that resembles a very strong partnership if not a formal security alliance. Despite a sharp drop in bilateral trade between Russia and China in 2015, and continuing differences over the terms of prospective energy deals, Moscow and Beijing remain united by the conviction that they share mutual security interests in checking Western ideological and strategic initiatives such as the promotion of human rights and the U.S. development and deployment of missile defence systems.<sup>24</sup> Traditional arguments downgrading the prospects for genuinely closer Russian strategic ties with China are giving way to a new perception that China has become the major alternative to an increasingly alienated West for keeping the Russian economy afloat and by China's prizing of advanced Russian weapons systems such as the S-400 surface-to-air missile system and Su-35 fighter jet. These weapons, if deployed in sufficient numbers, could eventually change the balance of military power in the Taiwan Strait and in the East and South China Seas in China's favour. Nor is it too much of an exaggeration to surmise a future scenario where Russia and China collectively impose greater strategic pressure on various NATO member-states (particularly in the Baltic), and on Taiwan or ASEAN states to erode U.S. strategic influence and credibility throughout Eurasia.

## CONCLUSION

How the new U.S. presidential administration acknowledges and confronts these challenges could well determine the extent to which American power remains a key component of both Asian and global geopolitics. To date, the outlook is less than promising. The Republican Party – traditionally the self-acclaimed guardian of U.S. foreign policy and security interests – is nominating a candidate that looks at the world as a series of deals that can be forged, revised or severed at will, notwithstanding how such interaction would alter the international security order. The Democratic candidate as a former U.S. Secretary-of-State, has irrefutable experience in the foreign policy arena and was one of the chief architects of the Obama administration's re-balancing strategy in Asia. However, the prospects of her domestic political and legal problems overshadowing her efforts to shape a coherent foreign policy remain high. Moreover, a number of her foreign policy initiatives pursued during the time she headed the U.S. Department of State – including her hardline postures towards Libya (now a 'failed state'), her positions directed toward Syria (which her critics argue helped usher in the ISIS caliphate), her reading (or misreading) of Russian and Chinese

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<sup>24</sup> Background on evolving Sino-Russian relations is offered by Alexander Gabuev, 'Russia's "China Dreams" are Less of a Fantasy Than You Think', *War on the Rocks*, June 28, 2016 at <http://warontherocks.com/2016/06/russias-china-dreams-are-less-of-a-fantasy-than-you-think/> and Gabuev, 'China's Pivot to Putin's Friends' *Foreign Policy*, June 25, 2016 at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/06/25/chinas-pivot-to-putin-friends-xi-russia-gazprom-timchenko-sinopec/>

geopolitics and her inability to stem the tide of North Korean nuclear proliferation – are now increasingly disparaged.<sup>25</sup> For either presidential candidate, the structural changes in Asia and beyond have become critical to U.S. policy-makers calculations in identifying and pursuing the American national interest.

In the absence of sufficient (many would say ‘renewed’) American leadership in responding to such changes, Southeast Asia and the region as a whole confront fundamental and largely unpleasant choices on how to accommodate or contest Chinese power and how to pursue order-building in their part of the world. Their basic objective, therefore, would seem to be at least selective security cooperation with the US while retaining their ability to leverage against China when necessary to preserve their own sovereign prerogatives and to exploit diplomatic, economic and strategic opportunities as they arise.

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<sup>25</sup> For a recent example of such critiques, see Crispin Rovere, ‘Hillary Clinton’s Foreign Policy Performance: The Worst. Ever.’ *The National Interest*, June 2, 2016 at <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/hillary-clintons-foreign-policy-performance-the-worst-ever-16436>