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U.S. Prosperity Is Intertwined With Asian Prosperity

By Stephanie Kleine-Ahlbrandt

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2 To question the necessity of the pivot is nonsensical. Our future prosperity and security is intertwined with the prosperity and security of the Asia-Pacific region. Over the past 20 years, China and India's share of the global economy has tripled and in the next decade the region will account for almost half of global economic output. U.S. exports to the region account for more than 60 percent of total U.S. exports.

There are few issues that are not going to be defined and solved – or made worse – by what happens in Asia over the next few decades; the U.S. cannot sit on the sidelines, unless we are consigning ourselves to the ash bin of history.

The Obama administration recognized this when it adopted its strategy to “rebalance” U.S. government attention and resources to the region. While, as a Pacific power, U.S. presence has underpinned security

and prosperity in the region for decades, the region's security landscape is shifting. Disputes over maritime security and territorial issues, the threat of North Korea's nuclear weapons programs, and the potential for major power conflict have increased.

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In implementing the rebalance, the U.S. moved swiftly with its military aspects, announcing Marine deployments to Darwin, Australia, the re-posture of navy forces, and increased cooperation with allies and partners in the region. But in Beijing this was perceived as a direct challenge and part of a larger containment strategy.

In fact, the rebalance does not seek to change the standing U.S. policy towards China, which is built on the dual pillars of engagement and hedging. And the rebalance at its core is about deepening U.S. engagement with its allies in the region, because getting China right can only be done through effective regional policy.

In order for the rebalance to be more effective and seen as less confrontational, more attention and resources need to be given to diplomatic, economic and civil society elements of the policy.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership can be considered a cornerstone of the rebalance. It will play a vital role in rulemaking for the global economy's main actors and further integrate the U.S. into the region. While not so long ago China perceived the initiative as a containment move, it has changed its view and now sees it as a "WTO 2.0," which could also help China with its own reform. Unfortunately President Obama was unable to cut a deal with Japan in time for his visit this week. In order to establish leadership in the region, the United States must overcome domestic and foreign policy factors to conclude the partnership.

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The rebalance needs an internal recalibration to focus on far more than security arrangements. If Obama can deliver results on the Trans-Pacific Partnership, that would go a long way to reinvigorating the U.S.

as the hub on regional trade and standards in a region that will drive global and economic trends in the 21st century.



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