

A decorative graphic consisting of a grid of dots in various shades of gray and red, arranged in a pattern that suggests a world map or a network.

»Presence with a Purpose«

The Reorientation of US Security Policy,
the Rise of China and Its Consequences for the Role
of the United States in Europe

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- The debate on a reorientation of American security policy is taking place against the background of massive economic difficulties.
- Debates on »American decline« have been a recurrent feature of the past couple of centuries. Discussions of a reorientation of American foreign policy are also taking place against this background, with marked effects on policy.
- The United States has come up with a logical approach, coordinated between the relevant government departments and reflecting a broad consensus between the political parties and academic experts. The administration has already begun to implement this approach with a combination of political initiatives, official visits by high-ranking government representatives and the transfer of troops to the Pacific.
- Over the coming decades the Pacific region will take on greater political and economic significance. European policy must adapt to this and, where possible, coordinate closely with its American partners. Instead of reducing US strategy to a »turning away« from Europe, German and European policy should grasp the American »turning towards« the Pacific as an opportunity for closer cooperation.



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1. Introduction

Not for the first time US policy in the Pacific is being viewed with some scepticism in Germany. In 1968, then Chancellor Candidate Willy, on a visit to Washington, made no bones about the fact that he had misgivings about the shift of US interests from Europe to Asia and feared a reduction of US engagement in Europe (Judith 2010: 282). The foreign policy considerations that concerned Willy Brandt today seem astonishingly relevant as US policy is undergoing major changes. The rise of emerging countries, such as China, the crisis in Europe and continuing financial constraints are forcing the United States into a policy reorientation and smarter allocation of resources that are becoming increasingly scarce. In a rare instance of agreement both Republican and Democrat think tanks recommend a reorientation of US foreign policy in the direction of Asia. The new defence policy guidelines announced by President Obama at the Pentagon in January 2012 were strongly influenced by the academic debate. They renew the United States' power political claims in the region and reaffirm US commitment to its Asian alliance partners. In a speech delivered in Canberra that made quite a stir the President also symbolically underlined the political significance of his new policy.

The United States' new policy in Europe has given rise to mixed reactions. One superficial interpretation of US strategy that is frequently encountered, namely that the United States is turning away from Europe, does not bear close examination. In its new guidelines the Obama administration not only reaffirms its commitment to its Article 5 obligations, but also describes Europe as its most important partner in maintaining security and economic stability (Department of Defence 2012a: 2). Since Europe has now gone from being a consumer to being a producer of security, however, the United States has the strategic opportunity to rebalance its commitments. The fact that the announcements made by President Obama will not be without consequences has been discernible for several months since the new policy was unveiled. For example, the first two combat brigades of the US Army in Germany have already left and the pressure is increasing on Europeans to bear more of the costs of their own security in future. Besides the question of the distribution of the burden within NATO the fundamental question of the future character of transatlantic relations is also back on the agenda.

This paper first briefly outlines the most important elements of the new US policy and evaluates them against the background of the domestic political situation in the United States, which is strongly characterised by the on-going economic crisis. In order to be able to address the debate adequately the political and military role of the United States in the Pacific is presented in a historical excursus. The concluding part concerns recommendations for German policy. Is the United States really turning away from Europe? How large is its strategic capability? What are the connecting links to transatlantic cooperation? Does Europe see itself as an actor or as a commenting observer? Are there any expectations of Europe in the region? What role is the military playing in the achievement of security policy aims?

2. Political Background

There have been recurrent debates in American history about »the American decline«. Discussions about a re-orientation of US foreign policy take place against this background, with significant effects on policy. The most prominent example of the currently dominant »decline discourse« is the recent book by New York Times columnist Thomas L. Friedman and Johns Hopkins professor Michael Mandelbaum (Friedman and Mandelbaum 2011), whose analysis of the causes of the crisis, such as lack of investment, excessive energy use, a budget deficit that has got out of control and paralytic political structures in Washington, got it onto the bestseller lists. Despite their at times shattering evaluation the authors believe that America's supremacy in the world can be maintained as long as Washington finds the strength for far-reaching reform. Robert Kagan of the Brookings Institution, who has meanwhile become an adviser to Mitt Romney, vehemently contradicts the decline-thesis in his latest book (Kagan 2012) and portrays a gloomy scenario of what would happen if the United States were to withdraw from being a »benevolent« hegemon on the world stage. Kagan sees in the very debate on America's decline a fatal sign of weakness. Kagan sees no serious reason for the United States to have to renounce its supremacy in either the rise of China or increasing defence costs.¹ But this standpoint is far from undisputed. At the latest since Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of the Great*

1. A thesis that is shared by many conservative think tanks: cf. among others: The American Enterprise Institute/The Heritage Foundation/The Foreign Policy Initiative (2010).

Powers (1989) most US authors have put the relationship between economic power and the projection of military power to the fore, a line of argument that Mandelbaum recently took up again in his book »The Frugal Superpower«. Perhaps the most influential publication from this school of thought – *The Post-American World* – was published in 2009 (and recently revised) by Fareed Zakaria and found a broad public. Charles Kupchan (2012) also provides an example of an influential contribution to the debate that seeks to prepare the American public for a gradual process of decline of US power and thus for the need to get involved in interaction with new power political actors in an ever more complex world.

The debate about a reorientation of US security policy is taking place against the background of enormous economic difficulties. The US budget deficit is now over 3 trillion dollars and the continuing weak growth has raised unemployment to a level that has exacerbated the traditionally strong polarisation of American politics. No wonder, in that case, that many Americans sometimes link the debate on national decline very closely with their own situation. The crisis has also hit the country in a period of radical change. America's demographic composition is changing dramatically in some states in favour of what previously were minorities, such as Hispanics or Asian Americans, because despite all its problems the United States remains a magnet to immigrants (some demographers even assume a population increase of up to 100 million by 2050) (Kotkin 2010). But social policy liberalisation has also changed America significantly in the course of a few years. The most striking is probably the abolition of the »don't ask, don't tell« rule introduced by President Clinton which prohibited professed homosexuals from serving in the armed forces. When President Obama abolished this rule he could rely on the support of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and all service chiefs, with the exception of the Marine Corps. Ten years ago this would have been unimaginable. But changes provoke fears which can be put to political use and can contribute to people's uncertainty. This includes what many Americans regard as their country's loss of prestige and power. And the traumatic experience of 11 September still looms large in the national memory. American society has been under heightened stress for a number of years: fears of terrorism, the burden of two wars and the financial crisis have all left their mark. The rise of China has thus become a symbol of America's

decline for the Republican Party, but is felt as a threat by many people.

Mitt Romney's advisers recognised early on that the debate on the »American decline« provides the Republicans with an opportunity to associate President Obama with a discourse of decline by interpreting every conciliatory gesture, such as the offers to Iran at the beginning of his term of office, as proof of his weakness. But the President, too, is mindful of the mood of the electorate, for example, trying to capture the growing war fatigue and promising »nation-building at home« after the end of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (The White House 2011a).

Despite the party political polarisation in recent years a remarkable political consensus has emerged over US policy with regard to Asia. For example, George W. Bush's policy towards India, including the nuclear deal which met with such consternation in Europe, found favour with most Democrats and was continued by Barack Obama. The rise of emerging countries, such as China, and the effects on America's position in the world have preoccupied the think tank community in Washington for a number of years and on the occasion of the change of administration in the White House a series of recommendations were published (see Cossa et al. 2009). This minimal consensus can be summarised as follows: politically, the United States must focus its resources more strongly on Asia at all levels, from presidents to regular diplomats. It must also assure old allies of continuing support, forge new alliances and must exclude the Pacific region from the on-going cuts in the defence budget.

Besides political considerations the new American policy is being driven chiefly by fiscal necessities. An exploding deficit and the fact that China has now become the largest holder of US government bonds mean that the debt problem is increasingly a factor in national security.

3. Schools of Thought

Current problems have provoked a lively debate in the US strategic community, at the centre of which lies the question of the right »grand strategy«; in other words, gathering all available power political instruments to achieve a political objective. New approaches and the divergent views on America's role in the world that have existed since the founding of the country complement

each other here. In a study for the Center for Naval Analysis and Solutions (CNA) Elbridge Colby identifies four basic outlines for a »Grand Strategy« that fit most of the important think tanks (Colby 2011):

Advocates of the »**Strategy of Hegemony**« assume that the world is basically anarchic and that without the leadership of a hegemon it would descend into uncontrollable military conflicts. The supporters of this strategy represent the view that the United States should strive for such a status, but should at least achieve such a strong position that it will be able to maintain a decisive influence over the regulation of international politics.

The view that Colby describes under the heading »**Selective Engagement**« envisages for the United States a continuing strong military presence in vital regions, but distances itself from an all-embracing claim to hegemony. The core of this strategy is to maintain extensive military capabilities in order, should it prove necessary, to be able to intervene on behalf of its allies. For this purpose, the United States must retain substantial forces in some regions, but no longer be represented equally strongly all over the world.

The representatives of the strategy of »**offshore balancing**« advocate the farthest reaching withdrawal of US forces from regions such as Europe and Asia. They should be succeeded by a strongly equipped army with sea-based capacities for rapid deployment on the ground wherever it should be necessary.

There are also advocates in the American debate of an »**integration of American strategy into collective efforts**«, although thus far such voices have not had much influence.

4. Basic Elements of the New Policy

When President Obama stepped into the press room of the Pentagon on 5 January 2012 he was not only entering new political territory: a sitting US President had never before announced a new policy on the other side of the Potomac. The fact that during his short speech the collected military leadership of the country literally stood behind the President made the political significance of the new strategy also visually clear. It is not only in an election year that it is politically risky to implement cuts

in the defence budget, thereby exposing oneself to accusations of weakness and interference with the military. The »Defense Guidelines« are the result of a months-long consultation process, in which the President – according to media reports – intervened personally on a number of occasions. The most important points are as follows:

Global Security Environment

- The security environment in which the United States has to act remains extremely complex. Despite the elimination of Bin Laden and the consequent massive weakening of his network the terrorist threat to the United States and its allies remains and will be actively combated. This applies in particular to countries such as Pakistan, Yemen, Afghanistan and Somalia.
- The United States will continue to strive to counter these dangers in cooperation with its allies.
- US economic interests in the crescent from the Western Pacific through East Asia to the Indian Ocean and South Asia are inseparable from American security interests. Thus even if the United States continues to participate in the maintenance of stability worldwide there must be a reorientation towards the Pacific.
- The United States seeks a deepening of cooperation with its partners in the region, paying particular attention to the cultivation of long-term strategic relations with India.
- Over the long term, the United States sees that the rise of China to become a regional power is likely to affect its military and economic interests in various ways. The ability of the United States to maintain stability will depend fundamentally on its military presence in the region. Furthermore, transparency is needed on Beijing's side, in particular with regard to military planning, in order to build trust.
- In cooperation with its partners the United States will ensure open access to the region and respect for international law. A cooperative bilateral relationship with China is in the interests of both countries.
- The United States is ambivalent towards developments in the Middle East. The Arab Spring entails

risks, but democratic development is in the long-term interests of the United States. Of particular importance is the prevention of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the region. That applies in particular to Iran's nuclear programme.

- The instability of the region and the security of Israel require a special military presence in the region for the foreseeable future.
- Europe remains for the foreseeable future the most important US partner in the implementation of its global security interests, although now most European states have become producers rather than consumers of security. The withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan provides the United States with an opportunity to adjust its engagement in Europe.

Main Task of US Military Forces

- The fight against terrorism remains a key task of US forces, principally the aim of destroying Al Qaeda and its allies. Capabilities for combating terrorism and waging irregular war must therefore be maintained and further developed. Other terror organisations, such as Hezbollah, remain under observation.
- Military forces should be in a position to deter enemy attack and if necessary to be able to defeat all potential enemies. The ability to fight a war anywhere in the world, should the need arise, should be maintained even if US troops are already committed to another extensive operation elsewhere in the world. (The doctrine hitherto has been to maintain the capability of conducting two full-scale wars in different regions of the world simultaneously.)
- The United States is increasingly faced with so-called A2/AD (Anti-Access/Area Denial) weapons, with which potential enemies could make access to or operations in critical regions impossible to the United States and its allies. In order to continue to be able to operate in disputed areas joint military operational concepts should increasingly be developed, together with capabilities – such as submarines – that improve missile defence. New stealth bombers should also be developed.

- Because of the threat to critical infrastructure through cyber-attack the United States will develop the relevant capabilities to defend its networks together with its allies.
- Until President Obama's vision of a nuclear-free world is realised, the United States will stick to its doctrine of nuclear deterrence. In future, a smaller arsenal of nuclear warheads may suffice for that purpose.
- Homeland protection remains a key task of the armed forces and cooperation with civilian institutions – for example, in disaster control – will be strengthened.
- After the burdens arising from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan the United States will give preference to civilian resources for future stabilisation missions. Resources will be maintained for limited stabilisation operations. However, in future the United States wishes to avoid long-term, large-scale stabilisation operations.
- US military forces will also continue to be available for humanitarian and disaster operations.

5. America and the Pacific Region

For American historians, the notion that the United States is turning away from Europe and towards the Pacific must be irritating. Even if the United States is present in the Pacific geographically only in the form of a number of groups of islands its current claim to power can look back over a 150-year history. During the first decades of its existence the anti-colonial impetus from the Revolutionary period precluded an open imperialistic policy on the part of the young Republic. US power politics in the Pacific were thus conducted under the cloak of opening up new markets. In 1854 Commodore Perry signed a treaty that forced Japan to open up its markets to US goods. Perry, who on his voyage also visited what is now Taiwan and noted the island's strategic potential, is still honoured in his homeland today.

The first change of course in foreign policy took place under President McKinley. After the Spanish-American War in 1898 he not only annexed the former Spanish possessions Cuba and Puerto Rico, but also the Philippines (where American troops brutally suppressed the independence movement). In 1890 the island group of Hawaii was formally incorporated into the US state.

Among the territories that the United States occupied in the wake of the Spanish defeat was the island of Guam, which even today is of major strategic significance for the American military presence in the Pacific. The Spanish-American War represents a turning point with regard to the violent expansion of the United States outside the American continent. The results of this short war, which was heavily influenced by the newly developing popular press, have been largely ignored in Europe, with the exception of Spain, where the national »disaster of 1898« is still embedded deeply in the national consciousness. Astonishingly, that also applies to perceptions of the Second World War, which for the United States began as a »Pacific war« with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour and ended with the capitulation of Japan, also in the Pacific. The decision of President Roosevelt, with the »Atlantic first« strategy, to concentrate American military forces first of all in the European theatre of war was controversial within the American leadership. Even today, many Americans remember the Second World War as the »Pacific War«.

After the end of the Second World War the United States built up a closely-meshed net of alliances that still form the basis for American power projection in the Pacific (Australia, New Zealand, USA, ANZUS Treaty 1951; Mutual Defense Treaty USA–Philippines 1951; Treaty on Mutual Security between Japan and the United States 1952; SEATO 1954 dissolved again in 1977; Taiwan Relations Act 1979).

Mao Tse-tung's victory in the Chinese Civil War in 1949 put an end to hopes of a powerful ally in the region (at the Casablanca conference in 1943 it was primarily the Americans who had insisted on the participation of Chiang Kai-shek). A little later Mao's decision to enter the war on the side of North Korea led to a dramatic escalation of the conflict. This intervention in a region to which a few years previously President Truman had attached no particular strategic importance cost not only the lives of 36,000 American troops but established America's military presence on the Korean peninsula which exists even today. If one takes into consideration the no less costly Vietnam War (1967–1974) it is not surprising that the United States has long considered itself a »Pacific power«. For America, the Cold War took place in Europe, the »hot« one in Asia.

6. Initial Situation in Asia

»The enormous Pacific Ocean is big enough for China and the United States.« With these words China's president designate Xi Jinping, before his visit in spring 2012, sought to allay US fears that the Pacific could be the scene of a new block confrontation (Washington Post 2012). Chinese policy finds itself in an apparent dilemma: in order to safeguard China's ascent – many Chinese people would say, to restore China's traditional position in the world – it must avoid serious conflict which could cause growth to collapse. Social instability could rapidly undermine the power position of the Chinese Communist Party. The days when China, following Deng Xiaoping's famous dictum, could restrain itself in foreign policy questions and conceal its capabilities in order to dedicate itself to building up the economy belong to the past. Its comet-like ascent over the past decade means that China, like it or not, has finally become an actor on the international stage. However, Beijing's policy is a balancing act between rhetorical insistence on its peaceful ambitions and military reassurance, in particular by means of maritime armament (Arbeitskreis Sicherheitspolitik 2011). The days of an undisputed ruler, as in the times of Mao or Deng, also belong to the past. With growing prosperity the plurality of Chinese society has also increased. In particular, the commercialisation of the press – not to be confused with freedom of the press – has stepped up the pressure on the leadership to adopt more nationalistic positions. Lack of clear jurisdiction and competing actors within the Chinese power system are also increasingly hindering the pursuit of a consistent and predictable foreign policy in sensitive areas, such as the South China Sea (International Crisis Group 2012). These internal power struggles make it clear that in China there can be no question of an undisputed centralistic dictatorship; instead, different circles in the regions and in the central government struggle for influence.

Beijing is running the risk, due to its armament and increasingly nationalistic rhetoric, that the United States will be able to take advantage of re-emerging anxieties concerning Chinese dominance in the region to consolidate its position.

Due to its economic rise China has become an important factor in American policy. The debate on an appropriate US China policy is characterised by three options. For example, John Mearsheimer assumes that China will use

its growing influence to dominate the Pacific in the same way as the United States has Western Europe. One logical objective of Chinese policy, therefore, is to drive the United States out of the region in the medium term and to implement a Chinese version of the Monroe doctrine in Asia. As a consequence, Mearsheimer sees America's role as weakening China in such a way that it is no longer in a position to pursue such a policy (Mearsheimer 2006). Besides this point of view, which in the extreme case would also resort to pre-emptive military means, there is the second, more traditional approach of »containment«. Representatives of this view, such as Gideon Rachman, assume that the United States must prepare itself for China's continuing rise over the long term and to safeguard US interests needs a credible military threat (Rachman 1996). Although Rachman is not against co-operation with China in itself, he does not consider China's rise as good news for the United States, which has cause to fear for its hegemony. China's rise, according to Rachman, is no »win-win situation« but rather a zero-sum game that is likely to go hand in hand with the decline of the United States (Rachman 2012). Adapting to China's rise in a cooperative way and ensuring that the country becomes a responsible actor within the international community is the third basic line, already sketched out in 2007 by a taskforce of the Council on Foreign Relations, which still exercises considerable influence on policy and also on the Obama administration. This approach assumes that a policy of »enhanced engagement«, aimed at China's close integration, would best serve US interests in the long term. Despite emerging conflicts, reconciliation of interests with China is possible (Council on Foreign Relations 2007). Henry Kissinger (2011) argues in the same direction when he contradicts the thesis that Chinese-US relations are a zero-sum game and calls for the creation of a Pacific Community.

In the course of the visits by President Obama to Beijing in November 2009 and the return visit by State President Hu Jintao to Washington in January 2011 the two countries put the foundations of their relations on a broader basis. Bilateral relations have now come to encompass, besides the Strategic and Economic Dialogue, other regular meetings at the highest level in almost all areas of policy and even include meetings between the armed forces. In the closing document of the Washington summit the United States welcomes the growing importance of the People's Republic and a stronger international role for China, while China expressly recognises the role of

the United States in the Pacific (The White House 2011b). Official American policy is thus pursuing the cooperative option, regardless of much shrill rhetoric in Washington.

7. Alliance Policy and Power Projection

In practice, however, American policy represents rather a combination of the containment and the engagement approach (»congruence«). Thus the United States is in the process of gradually transforming the old alliance structures from the Cold War into an instrument against China (Friedberg 2011). That applies, for example, to traditional allies, such as Thailand and the ANZUS countries. The defence alliance with Japan, after some short-lived difficulties under Prime Minister Hatoyama, could also be revived. At the same time, Chinese armament has rendered countries such as Vietnam *de facto* allies of the United States. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on several visits has emphasised America's role in the region and has paid tribute to the role of the allies. The states of South East Asia are paid particular attention in this respect, having been neglected by successive US administrations since the US withdrawal from the Philippines in 1992, although their economic and geostrategic importance has grown constantly in recent years.

One of the challenges facing the United States is not to overextend itself. Although for many countries in the region an American presence is a welcome and extremely useful factor in extending their own scope of action with regard to Beijing the view widely held in Washington that states such as India could be harnessed against China is at best naïve. Although China's neighbour welcomes a strong US engagement there are no allies in the region for a pure containment policy. Even traditional US allies, such as Australia, do not regard China as a threat to their own security, but rather call for China's inclusion as a responsible actor in the region and the international community. Canberra is thus at pains to avoid putting unnecessary strain on its ever closer economic relations with China (Commonwealth of Australia 2009). Looked at in this way, American policy is a balancing act, since a confrontational policy in the region can only lead rapidly to counterproductive consequences.

Militarily, America's biggest worry is Chinese efforts concerning so-called A2/AD capabilities (see above). Of key significance in this respect are, among other things,

highly developed, mainly space-based guidance systems that make it possible to locate enemy ships promptly. In recent years, in particular the Chinese navy has been systematically improving its capabilities, for example, through the development of anti-ship missiles and its aerial warfare capabilities. Nevertheless, neither these improved capabilities nor the recent acquisition of an old Ukrainian aircraft carrier – mainly for training purposes – have put it in a position to seriously challenge US power projection. However, Chinese armament does pose considerable problems to US planners. Thus Secretary of Defense Panetta recently outlined comprehensive plans intended in future to ensure the United States full freedom of movement in all vital regions of the globe. This includes investment in new fighter planes, submarines, improved precision weapons and cyber capabilities. The United States is also departing from the 50/50 formula that has applied hitherto, according to which the strength of the navy was divided more or less equally between the Atlantic and the Pacific. By 2020 60 per cent of naval forces, including six carrier groups, are to be stationed in the Pacific (U.S. Department of Defence 2012b).

Indirect US security guarantees for Taiwan continue to represent not only a political, but also a military problem for China because American allies such as Japan also benefit from the US shield for Taiwan and limit the freedom of movement of the Chinese navy. The consequence of this is an increasing arms race in the region (SIPRI 2011). The issue for China is the credibility of its political claims in its own neighbourhood and the question of whether the country is ready and, if need be, militarily in a position to assert its claims. For the United States, whose military potential for the time being has no need of such a credibility test, it's all about demonstrating to its allies its reliability and determination. It is thus not by chance that President Obama's core message in Canberra was »we are here to stay« (Obama 2011).

8. Evaluation

The United States has come up with an in itself logical conception coordinated between the relevant government authorities and reflecting a broad consensus between the parties and academic experts. In a combination of political initiatives, visits by high-ranking government representatives and the transfer of troops the administration has already commenced implementation of this

conception, thus underlining the political significance of the strategy.

The dominant impression in Germany has been that, as a result of its new policy, the United States will turn away from its allies in Europe. A sober evaluation of the motives and consequences of the American strategy is needed so that German policy can adapt itself to the new circumstances. On closer inspection the new US approach proves to be much more nuanced than first reports suggested. Undoubtedly, the unfortunate communication – »pivot to Asia« – has had its share in the negative reaction from Europe, a mistake that the administration rapidly corrected: now the talk is only of »rebalancing«. To sum up, the United States are taking the logical political and military steps in response to the global shifts of recent years, shifts from which the export-oriented German economy in particular has benefited massively.

Military conflict in the Pacific region would have unforeseen consequences for the stability of the world economy and would hit Germany particularly hard. Since neither Germany nor other European countries have the capabilities for military power projection in the Pacific the US commitment to its Pacific role and the maintenance of stability in the region are in Germany's fundamental interest. At the same time, however, a withdrawal of the US presence in Europe beyond the reduction decided on now is not in Germany's interest. The ability of the United States to perform this role in the Pacific also depends on stability in Europe. In other words, there is an intrinsic connection between the Europeans taking more responsibility for their own security and the success of the American Pacific strategy. Europe should understand this as an incentive to go ahead with a common foreign and security policy (International Security Policy Working Group 2012). A stronger role for Europe with regard to security in its own region could thus also become the basis for a renewed Transatlantic partnership. An enhanced US political and military presence will not in itself guarantee stability in the region. Much will depend on whether the administration in Washington avoids a provocative policy with regard to China because the combination of military armament and a more aggressive political course harbours the danger of escalation, which cannot be in Germany's interest.

In contrast to media reporting to date the military aspect is not the sole focus of the new strategy. The United States is basically working with the resources already available in the region, and additional deployments, such as four modern littoral combat ships in Singapore or rotating marine units in Australia, are of more symbolic value. The core of US policy consists of reassuring the regional allies that it will remain a military presence in the Pacific and is committed to an enhanced and systematic political engagement in the region, as President Obama and other high-ranking politicians have demonstrated through their participation in regional forums, such as the East Asia Summit. This policy is supplemented by initiatives towards stronger economic integration, including the Trans-Pacific Partnership. The basic US assumption is that cooperation with China is both possible and desirable. China's closer integration as a responsible actor in the international community remains the dominant strategy of US policy, a strategy that contains many points of contact for German policy.

Since American policy corresponds to German interests in important respects the opportunity arises to give new impetus to Transatlantic relations through a Pacific policy that follows the US strategy and to work out a policy for the Pacific jointly with the United States. To that end, however, Germany cannot regard China as a bilateral partner, but must closely coordinate its policy with the allies.

As far as security policy is concerned there are no real expectations concerning Europe in the region. Politically, however, there is an interest in a stronger political role. Many authors draw a comparison between the rise of China and Imperial Germany before the First World War, coming to the conclusion that a military confrontation between the United States and China cannot be avoided over the long term. Even though the historical determinism on which this thesis is based is questionable the conflict potential that goes hand in hand with the increasing military presence in the region cannot be ignored. It is thus in Germany's interest to contribute to a cooperative climate, not hysteria concerning China:

- Supporting forces in the United States that favour a system of regional cooperation with China rather than new military blocs and putting this policy into practice itself.

- Promoting the creation of cooperative structures and harnessing its own experiences and competences to that end.

- Boosting initiatives on naval armaments control.

The Pacific has established itself as one of the most dynamic economic areas in the world and, despite all the political tensions described in this paper, has proved to be astonishingly stable. Maintaining this stability against the background of China's growing political and economic claims will be the key task of the coming decades, to which German policy – within the framework of its capabilities – should contribute. Despite the veritable explosion in the number of regional forums, pacts and discussion platforms to date there has been no comprehensive regional security system. German policy in particular, with its extensive experience of the EU, NATO, OSCE and so on, could discretely support such a development. Proposals such as the formation of a »Pacific Community« (Kissinger 2011) or the initiative of former prime minister of Japan Hatoyama for an »East Asian Community« could be taken up for that purpose (Hatoyama 2009). Simply to assume a linear development of Chinese growth and of the stability that goes with it, without shocks or interruptions, as many dubious interpretations do, could rapidly turn out to be an illusion.

To some extent this also applies to the new US strategy. It would not be the first time that an American president declared priorities that he subsequently was unable to realise. Given the highly polarised domestic political situation and a borderline dysfunctional political system current US strategic capabilities should not be overestimated. Potential trouble spots outside the Asia-Pacific area, as shown not least by the war in Libya, can rapidly take on their own dynamics and render all previous plans obsolete. Europeans, as German policy in Washington should make unambiguously clear, thus remain, not least on account of the political common ground occupied by Western democracies, the most reliable partners of the United States. The continuing crisis in the Eurozone therefore threatens, long term, to damage Europe's reputation and influence in Washington, but also to call into question American calculations based on a stable »Europe whole and free«.

The growing Chinese dominance is regarded by many American politicians as a potential threat not only to the

United States, but also to democracy (in Asia). China's authoritarian capitalism (Friedberg 2011: 183) for a significant part of American policy is not only a potential economic and military challenge, but also an ideological one (Colby 2011: 16). Even though President Obama has significantly scaled down »democratisation« as an element of US foreign policy, in the already complex context of Asia's balance of power US policy's inherent missionary impulse remains an unpredictable element for Europe.

The extent to which Germany can influence American Pacific policy is limited. This can be increased, however, through a more resolute policy focus. This requires a political process that outlines its own Pacific policy, closely coordinated with the European partners. The last programmatic document of German Asian policy dates from May 2002 and even the introductory words make it clear how urgent it is to work out a new concept: »The twenty-first century, as many people said at the close of the twentieth century, will be the Asian century. This assumption has not withstood the disruptions of the Asian crisis and the political upheavals as a consequence of

11 September 2001 and the subsequent efforts towards a strategic reorientation on the part of the more important states in the region« (Federal Foreign Office 2002). Ten years later, practically no one would share this view. The Pacific region will undoubtedly gain in political and economic importance over the coming decades. European policy must adapt itself accordingly and, where possible, coordinate with its American partners. Instead of reducing US strategy to a »turning away« from Europe, German and European policy should understand the American »turn« towards the Pacific as an opportunity for closer cooperation. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and High Representative Catherine Ashton have consistently confirmed their intention to deepen US–EU dialogue with regard to Asia (U.S. Department of State 2012). The extent to which Europe will be able to exert influence in this dialogue will depend not only on the strength of its arguments, but also on its ability to solve the crisis in the Eurozone. This crisis threatens to damage the most important instrument of European foreign policy, the attractiveness of its integration model, with lasting effect.



Literature

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About the authors

The International Security Policy working group is a Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung forum for the exchange of views on current security policy issues. It draws its members from the Bundestag, federal ministries and academic institutions. They include: Franz H. U. Borkenhagen, Hans-Georg Ehrhart (IFSH), Roland Kästner, Niels Annen (FES), Christos Katsioulis (FES), Gero Maaß (FES), Detlef Puhl, Sammi Sandawi, Michael Schäfer, Axel Schneider and Oliver Thränert.

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Dr. Gero Maaß, Head, International Policy Analysis

Tel.: ++49-30-269-35-7745 | Fax: ++49-30-269-35-9248
www.fes.de/ipa

To order publications:
info.ipa@fes.de

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