



Strategic Shift towards Asia – A European Perspective

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Abstract

In November 2011 U.S. President Barack Obama announced the strategic ‘pivot’ to Asia, the most important strategic shift since the Cold War. A key driver has been the assessment that the geopolitical relevance of Asia has grown considerably. Europe is no longer the cockpit of world affairs. NATO and the European Union – which the U.S. increasingly is seeing under German lead – need to adapt their policies addressing the altered challenges to security and prosperity in a systematic way. The consequent realignment will profoundly reshape the European Union politically and economically, with major implications for NATO and other elements of the transatlantic partnership. European policy should have a much stronger focus on Asia and the Pacific. As the Asia-Pacific region is confronted with the same global opportunities and risks as the rest of mankind, Asia, Europe and NATO together should strive for common comprehensive capabilities to meet the challenges ahead. A focus area could be the Maritime Domain.

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ANALYSIS

1. New Drivers

In November 2011 U.S. President Barack Obama announced the strategic ‘pivot’ to Asia, the most important strategic shift since the Cold War. The Atlantic setting of West versus East has become redundant. This pivot has become the signature foreign policy of the Obama administration.

A key driver has been the assessment that the geopolitical relevance of Asia has grown considerably. Europe is no longer the cockpit of world affairs. Also the U.S. interest in the Arab world has started shrinking. Two further drivers have come to the fore

- Nation Building in the U.S.
- Shale Gas

With view to major economic and financial problems in the U.S., President Obama has started nation building at home – how he phrased it – and reorienting foreign commitments to face up to the rise of the Far East.

Both arguments, the focus on homework in the U.S. as the strategic shift towards the Pacific are about economic common sense. The world has moved on. According to the McKinsey Global Institute, the last decade showed “*the fastest rate of change in global economic balance in history*”. It calculates that the planet’s “*economic centre of gravity*” has been moving eastwards at a rate of about 140 kilometres a year.

Whereas America’s NATO allies have spent decades shrinking their military budgets and expecting the US to pick up the bill for their protection, the rising economies of the Pacific are investing increasingly in their defences. It is hardly surprising that Obama prefers to work with the latter. In the last decade, Indonesia has trebled its military spending. Thailand has increased theirs by two thirds, and Australia and South Korea by almost half. Clearly, this very fact is attracting U.S. national interest towards the Pacific as well.

Until recently, nobody would have guessed – given America’s gigantic appetite for foreign oil and gas – the U.S. would ever loose its interest in the Arab world. The discovery of vast quantities of shale gas in the U.S. has altered the historic equation. The International Energy Authority estimates that the U.S. will be almost ‘energy self-sufficient’ by 2035. That prospect means that America will inevitably begin to reconsider the monstrous sums it spends protecting its interests in the Persian Gulf. The vast U.S. Fifth Fleet, which is almost entirely responsible for patrolling the key shipping channels of the Middle East, costs the U.S. taxpayer up to \$80 billion dollars a year. But why should the U.S. sustain this effort? Most of the oil ends up in China and Europe.

Though America never really moved away from Asia, as its large military presence in South Korea and Japan attest, the ‘pivot’ is a realization that the nexus of global commerce and strategy has moved from the North Atlantic to the Western Pacific. The dynamism of Asia is impressive. Particularly China has become an industrial power of the first order. It has shown in the past years pragmatism, rational decision-making and discipline even in times of crisis.

Yet in East Asia, the world’s most dynamic and dominant region in terms of future global economic development, also confrontation has been escalating over border issues, territorial claims, prestige, and unfinished



historical business between key nations – China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan – not to speak of the everlasting crisis on the Korean peninsula and the Taiwan conflict. Consequently China and some Southeast Asian nations have considerably expanded their military instruments of power.

Europe, with view to its reach and resources, has had no major part in the region. Yet, given Europe's growing economic dependence on East Asia, its interests are massively engaged – a mismatch that could cause the EU considerable discomfort in the medium term. The same is true, to varying degrees, of Europe's relationship with South Asia; but here the India-Pakistan conflict, a looming "post-American" Afghanistan in 2014, and uncertainty concerning Iran and the Persian Gulf have a direct security impact on the European Union.

As the debate in Washington is largely focused on the scope and instruments of the pivot, this makes European observers uneasy – even more so as the Obama administration plans to reduce the U.S. military presence in Europe again. Viewing the pivot as a turn away from Europe has become a common perception in European capitals.

The U.S. left over for their European partners is considerable – in Southeast Europe, North Africa and the Greater Middle East. The diminished role for the United States is an important factor that make the upcoming period very different from past decades. The United States' role in NATO has already shifted from that of ultimate European security provider to more of an enabler of European defence. A geographical division of labour between Americans and Europeans has started emerging, whereby the United States focuses on Asia and the Middle East, while Europeans concentrate on their near and Mediterranean neighbourhoods.

At the same time, the situation in Southeast Europe has become worrisome again. And, there has never been a period in recent history where the Middle East was so volatile. In North Africa, Europe is in an important battle on Al-Qaeda in Al-Maghreb with France a leading role. In Syria, the Patriot missiles deployed under a NATO umbrella along the Turkish-Syrian borders are mostly supplied by European countries: Germany and the Netherlands. In the Arabian Gulf region the size of the U.S. fleet has been reduced with the withdrawal of two aircraft carrier strike forces. Finally in Afghanistan the United States will soon start the drawdown of its forces.

Against this background it is obvious: the news that the United States, Europe's main security provider and alliance partner for more than 60 years, would reorient its foreign and security policy towards the Pacific was clearly not welcome to most Europeans to include NATO-Europeans. NATO and the European Union – which the U.S. increasingly is seeing under German lead – need to adapt their policies addressing the altered challenges to security and prosperity in a systematic way. The consequent realignment will profoundly reshape the European Union politically and economically, with major implications for NATO and other elements of the transatlantic partnership.

I would not be complete without mentioning that there is also a different point of view. Isn't Asia-Pacific also "pivoting" towards Europe? Hasn't already the 2010 NATO Strategic Concept stated "*This Strategic Concept will guide the next phase in NATO's evolution, so that it continues to be effective in a changing world, against new threats, with new capabilities and new partners*"?

Clearly, Europe is an Atlantic power. Yet, it is also a peninsula of Asia. We should never forget that the world is round and the routes to the new centres of growth in the global economy do not lead only across the Pacific but also in the European case through the Suez Canal.



2. The Maritime Domain as Cooperation Venture?

In fact, the anti-terror and anti-piracy missions as well as the engagement in Afghanistan have opened the door of Asia to NATO, just as trade did for the European Union. As the coming decades are likely to see a decline in state sovereignty, a power shift from states to international or non-state networks, and dynamic growth in the lethal power of these non-state actors the importance of closer EU – NATO – Asia cooperation is becoming a sheer necessity. Cyber-attacks, which have already become a new form of permanent warfare, will further increase in frequency and sophistication. We can expect their effects moving from the disruption of services to the physical destruction of hardware. Energy security is of increasing concern. Climate change, scarcity of resources, migration, terrorism, health risks and environmental hazards will be on top of the priority list of cooperative security policy.

As the Asia-Pacific region is confronted with the same global threats as the rest of mankind, i.e., Asia, Europe and NATO together should strive for common comprehensive capabilities to meet the challenges ahead. Climate-induced change is introducing instability in the maritime domain that will require political and also legal foresight as well as cooperation to resolve. The melting of the Arctic ice pack is opening stretches of formerly inaccessible sea lanes and ocean floor to transit and deep-sea mining. This topographical change, combined with advances in deep-seabed exploration and mining and the rising value of scarce mineral resources, is making the northern continental shelves of Asia, Europe, and North America more accessible and therefore more desirable.

Other climate change related concerns revolve around the use of natural resources, such as water. Among the nations at greatest risk to climate change and natural disasters are those in Asia and the Pacific. The region is also home to the internationally shared water sheds of the Himalayas that are crucial to the wellbeing of 1.3 billion people downstream. In many parts of the world, water issues cross national borders. Access to consistent and reliable sources of water in these regions is greatly valued. Changes in the timing and intensity of rainfall would threaten already limited water sources and potentially cause future conflicts. Threatened food security in parts of Asia could also lead to conflict. Rapid population growth and changes in precipitation and temperature, among other factors, are already affecting crop yields. Resulting food shortages could increase the risk of humanitarian crises and trigger population migration across national borders, ultimately sparking political instability. International cooperation or competition for the management of such natural and other resources will be important from a security perspective, in the region and beyond.

All of Southern Asia – from Afghanistan to Myanmar – will be affected by factors such as snowmelt in the Himalayas, the Karakorams, the Pamir and the Hindu Kush and rising sea levels. The consequences for low-lying countries, such as Bangladesh, could be dramatic. It is imperative that all countries of the region find ways to cooperate in order to tackle climate change-related problems, such as sustainable water management and food security. Related key challenges include sustainable production and consumption, climate change adaptation, disaster preparedness and energy security. Obviously, there is plenty of good reason for cooperation and the European Union's and NATO's comprehensive approach provide principally excellent possibilities to engage commonly in security and prosperity.

Unfortunately, until today the European Union's as NATO's comprehensive approach has rather been based on grand ideas than on concrete and pragmatic action. I have found in the recent past decade that particularly



European foreign & security policy makers have had difficulties with technology as they consider the issue too pedestrian for great minds. In my assessment this exactly has been a key reason, why grand ideas don't work. Implementing a Comprehensive Approach begins with a vision, but then it needs a pragmatic plan addressing people and their mindsets, organization – i.e. processes and architecture – and last but not least technology in order to make grand ideas work.

Clearly, in the future, decision-making processes will rely on an even closer integration of political, military, economic, humanitarian, and policing and intelligence instruments for conflict prevention and crisis management. This integration is the core of a comprehensive answer to the issue of effective structures for cooperation between the public sector and other parts of society – at national level and, in particular, across borders.

Standards & Interoperability have been key to EU's and NATO's success of the past. In looking at the future, particularly NATO has two outstanding best practices that should be considered: The Afghan Mission Network (soon to become future NATO's Future Mission Network) and NATO's Common Operational Picture. Both developments will serve in a global scale as best practice examples for humanitarian assistance & disaster management, security & defence and related business. Consequently they will shape both requirements and markets.

The Afghan Mission Network provides for a highly effective Collaboration (Cooperation) environment – quasi the I-Phone/I-Pad/PC for first responders and warriors. With the Afghan Mission Network for the first time in Alliance history a common C4ISR network has been established for all ISAF forces and operations consisting of the ISAF-Secret network as the core with national extensions. In times of austerity cuts these national extensions have an enormous shaping impact on national C4ISR structures. The Afghan Mission Network supports a NATO Common Operational Picture (NCOP). Soon this NCOP will provide NATO commanders and operational staffs with essential and reliable information that enables their understanding of comprehensive security environments in order to significantly improving situational awareness and supporting rapid decision-making.

Situational awareness is the prerequisite of comprehensive security. The purpose of situational awareness is to generate actionable knowledge. Knowledge is the decisive resource of all social processes and social organizations. As society turns into a knowledge society, access to knowledge and the exchange of information are becoming more and more universal: for individuals, social groups, politically and economically relevant actors, states, and alliances.

In future situational awareness will contribute to cultivating decision makers' capacity for increased awareness, mindfulness, and focus in an age of information distraction. It will force *learners* to expand their collection of inputs, selectively identify their filters used in synthesizing and sense-making. And it will help to mainstream system thinking and the imperative of understanding structure, relationships and feedback loops in a globally interdependent world.

Much of this is presently occurring outside the military in a broad scope of applications. For example IBM's vision of a Smart City has become a viable concept in Moscow, Amsterdam, Dubai and many other places in the world with tremendous dynamics. As an increasingly instrumented, inter-connected, and intelligent urban system, it has been focusing on positive impacts of Information Communication Technologies on the efficiency and effectiveness of healthcare and security, power and transport, and the practice of commerce and work. The Smart City is viewed as a 'system of systems' with the city realizing benefits through integration and



coherence amongst its systems. It is addressing urban performance as a function of the complex interplay between systems composed of infrastructures, capital, assets, behaviours, and cultures, addressing the economic, social, technological, political, and environmental spheres. Especially situational awareness is important for a Smart City as the addressed potentials can only be mobilized, if inhabitants, companies or the administration are aware of the cities' position, knowing the city from the inside but also being aware of the surroundings – including global networks – and the system of cities the city is located in.

Exactly this is the challenge in the security and crisis prevention/management context. Key actors need to be analyzed and understood from various perspectives, with particular attention paid to political, military, economic and social, information and infrastructure aspects. Consequently holistic approaches addressing issues like border security, maritime domain security, the protection of critical infrastructure or disaster relief operations as the Haiti earthquake in 2010 with its catastrophic magnitude – all of these concepts build on system of systems analysis and situational awareness as core functions to manage complex, dynamic and time critical challenges, i.e. for in Brazil, in Qatar, in Saudi Arabia and Singapore.

In sum, obviously there is technology that we could take advantage of in order to pragmatically build deeper cooperation.

Fortunately, there are also successful processes from which we could expand our cooperation.

Challenges to “*Maritime Security*” have many faces – piracy and armed robbery, maritime terrorism, illicit trafficking by sea, i.e. narcotics trafficking, small arms and light weapons trafficking, human trafficking, global climate change, cargo theft etc. These challenges keep evolving and may be hybrid in nature: an interconnected and unpredictable mix of traditional and irregular warfare, terrorism, and/or organized crime.

Countering Somali-based piracy in the Gulf of Aden has set an example how the EU – NATO – Asia cooperation could evolve in future. 26 participating nations from the Asia-Pacific region, the Mediterranean, NATO and the EU have coordinated their operations in this mission under the Shared Awareness and De-confliction (SHADE) forum for maritime security, in 2012 with additional Chinese participation. NATO's anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and engagements with other navies the past three years sharing information through SHADE has become a successful model of cooperation on maritime terrorism. In fact, SHADE has become the most important cooperation forum between NATO and China. We could and should build on this and not let this opportunity go away.

Cooperation on fighting piracy points in the direction of a future cooperation in the Maritime Domain. A comprehensive approach to Maritime Domain Security is indispensable to safeguarding common prosperity and security interests of both NATO's and Asia-Pacific nations as it effectively protects and supports legitimate activities, while countering the threat of current and emerging terrorist, hostile, illegal or dangerous acts within the maritime domain. By ensuring freedom of navigation and commerce, it also has the capacity to promote regional, and contribute to global, economic stability and protect maritime trade as the heart of regional and global economies.

With regard to national/multinational cooperation in such complex operations with many different actors involved, maritime domain awareness is needed in order to create a comprehensive picture of maritime activity based on accessible information in order to



- create the appropriate environment to promote the civilian-military aspects of cooperation, information sharing and maritime surveillance
- coordinate the participation and actions of all organizations and partners. This includes collaboration suites and integration of existing communication networks to an interoperable network
- enable Maritime Security within commercial practices; providing for a better situational awareness and understanding of how the commercial shipping sector might contribute to and benefit from Maritime Security, most notably in the energy sector

EU – NATO – Asia cooperation in the Maritime Domain would point at cooperation in regional and even global security issues. Cooperation in emergency response and humanitarian assistance could be important initial steps in that direction.

My recommendation: use cooperation in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief areas as a feasible avenue towards getting engaged with each other in substantial cooperation. To this end a collaboration environment like the Afghan Mission Network and a common Situational Awareness capability would bring enormous benefits, as they

- support a common understanding of what is going on,
- would ease the path towards common recommendations of what should be done,
- would provide for orchestrating common action of civil and military instruments and even would be very useful in collaborating in other mutual beneficial ventures, i.e. the Maritime Domain!

3. Coherent European Policy needed

Europe has not yet decided on one coherent policy on how to respond to the U.S. “pivot” to Asia. This may be understandable taking into consideration the effort that went into dealing with the Euro zone crisis last year. However, on paper at least, the newly created European External Action Service has made positive steps towards Asia in past year. High Representative Catherine Ashton continued her strategic dialogue with China. She visited other parts of Asia and participated for the first time in the ASEAN Regional Forum. It was at that forum where Ms. Ashton delivered her joint statement alongside U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on cooperation in Asia. The Topics covered included transnational crime, cyber-security, development, and *“the importance of open markets in enhancing growth and development in the Asia-Pacific region, which also has a direct and positive impact on the economies of the European Union and the United States.”* That statement might well become the blueprint for a more strategic approach to Asia among EU member states.

In June 2012, the EU published new foreign policy guidelines on Asia, which included clearer language on maritime issues and speaking out in favour of international law and peaceful solutions to regional territorial disputes. The EU and member states have ratified the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. This adds considerably to their credibility in that regard. In September last year when tensions flared between China and Japan on their maritime dispute, the EU through Ashton spoke out on the need for *“peaceful and cooperative solutions in accordance with international law.”*



The EU Approach to wider Asia Pacific builds on shared interests, and aims at promoting partnership development, throughout ASEAN and Oceania, with the emphasis in promoting:

- economic cooperation and trade;
- conflict resolution through the rule of International law;
- good Governance & Human Rights;
- tackling of non-traditional security threats;
- building regionalism and collective security.

To this end Partnership Arrangements have been agreed or are under negotiation with Strategic Partners like Russia, Japan, China, South Korea and India, important regional actors like Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, finally with third states, i.e. Brunei, Philippines, Myanmar, Vietnam, New Zealand and Thailand.

Overall, the scorecard shows that the EU has a new reality to face in Asia. On issues of trade and economics, the EU is clearly showing that it has a strategy that it is implementing. Here the EU really has a positive impact in the Asia-Pacific. Not disturbed by the global financial crisis and its impact on the Euro zone, the EU has managed to proactively engage in negotiations for a number of significant free trade agreements throughout the region. A free trade agreements deal with the Republic of Korea was concluded. Negotiations for an EU–Singapore FTA are almost complete. Malaysia, India and Vietnam are next in line, and recently Japan has been added to the target list.

On security issues, the track record is more uneven. Yet, framework agreements for joining EU - led crisis management: have been agreed with New Zealand and negotiated with Australia and the Republic of Korea. There is an EU mandate for launching negotiations with China, India and, Japan. There are already security and defence dialogue/staff talks with many Asian partners.

In sum, European policy should have a much stronger focus on Asia and the Pacific. Whether it is the situation on the Korean peninsula – where we Germans really have a unique experience of decades of partition and reunification – or the conflicting territorial claims disputes between Japan, South Korea and China and the countries bordering the South China Sea – the voice of Europe needs to carry weight in the region. Certainly we could and should offer our experience of peaceful conflict resolution on a continent which was once the world's most warlike. I believe that beyond business relations, Europe would be well advised to do more on the diplomatic front, in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and in Maritime Domain Awareness.

How Europe shapes up – or not – in the decade stretching ahead is therefore not only of principal importance to ourselves, but also to our Eastern neighbours, to Northern Africa, to the Middle East, and last but not least to Asia. To this end Europe needs strategic vision, patience and pragmatic ideas. The latter takes me back to my earlier recommendation: Shouldn't we start building practical cooperation via Maritime Domain Awareness? It would also ease cooperation in EU-led crisis management. To me this appears to be the Joint Venture we should seriously look at!



Remarks: Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.

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About the Author of this Issue

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