



Kerry Says There is No Let Up in US Asia Pivot

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STATE DEPARTEMENT — During last week's trip to Asia, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry worked to reassure allies about the Obama administration's commitment to its so-called Asia Pivot of political and military resources to the region.

The U.S. Asia Pivot is meant to bolster operations in the Asia Pacific with forces redeployed from Iraq and Afghanistan as Washington also plans to use new diplomatic and commercial resources to help reinforce its standing as a Pacific power.

"I want to confirm that the United States rebalance to the Asia Pacific remains a top priority for the Obama Administration," said Secretary of State John Kerry. "Every day, at the president's direction, we are directing more diplomatic, more economic and more military resources to help advance the goals that we share with our partners throughout this region."

It has not always been clear what those shared goals are because the goals of the pivot itself are unclear, says American Enterprise Institute analyst Michael Auslin.

"The administration never articulated what the pivot was for, what the rebalance was for. It's not that it was a bad idea. It was a good idea. But they never explained it. They never sold it. They never told us why it was important," he said.

Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton first launched the Asia Pivot, but Cato Institute analyst Doug Bandow says it has lost steam under Secretary Kerry.

"The pivot in many ways was Secretary Clinton's initiative. She focused on it. Secretary Kerry, of course, has spent a lot of time in the Middle East, a lot of time promoting negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis, now focused on Syria. So his emphasis never quite seemed to be as much on Asia," he said.

Secretary Kerry says there is no let-up on the Asia Pivot. And he has repeatedly sought to reassure Beijing it is not meant to check Chinese influence.

But China says the U.S. is interfering in rival territorial claims in the East China Sea and the South China Sea, where Washington says Beijing is displaying an "incremental pattern of

assertiveness."

"It is extremely irresponsible for the United States to make groundless accusations against China without checking the facts," said Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei.

Washington especially risks being drawn into the dispute over islands between China and Japan, where American University professor Lou Goodman says uncertainty about the Asia Pivot could make things worse.

"There are domestic politics operating in both China and Japan that when this issue gets raised causes responses that are strong," said Goodman.

Auslin says unmet expectations about a bigger presence in Asia could be worse than if Washington did nothing at all.

"We may have bitterly disappointed those who really were hoping for not only an expanded U.S. role but a more innovative U.S. role, a U.S. role that really looked at how you could build up a more liberal and democratic Asia, one that had rules and norms of order," he said.

Kerry says the Asia Pivot can best deliver through continued cooperation with regional alliances like ASEAN, something he says shows Washington's seriousness about the region through broad, across-the-board engagement.