

**OBAMA’S “REBALANCING”
TRIP TO EAST ASIA: SECURITY,
TRADE AND VALUES**

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Executive Summary

1. In April 2014, President Barrack Obama made a four-nation trip to bolster US “rebalancing” back to East Asia in the security, diplomatic and economic spheres amidst China’s rise.
2. Obama’s goal was to demonstrate that his “rebalancing” to Asia commitment will not waver despite pressing concerns in other hotspots in the world.
3. At his first stop in Tokyo, Obama became the first US president to declare that the US-Japan Security Treaty will apply to Japan-administered Senkaku (Diaoyu) islands disputed by China. However, he also urged a peaceful approach to the territorial dispute between Japan and China.
4. According to the US-Japan Joint Statement, both allies will assist in the capacity building of littoral Southeast Asian states.
5. However, there was no breakthrough for a Trans-Pacific Partnership deal despite late night negotiations. Issues in debate were Japanese agricultural protection of politically sensitive products of rice, wheat, beef, pork and dairy products, and greater market access for American automobiles.
6. For his Korea trip, Obama sought to reassure South Korea of its support amidst an unpredictable and nuclearizing North Korea, broker better relations between Seoul and Tokyo (bedevilled by territorial and historical conflicts) amidst China’s rise, and promote US economic interests.
7. In Seoul, Obama condemned Imperial Japan’s comfort women system as a “terrible” violation of human rights. This was probably a US signal to the Abe administration not to revise the Kono statement (which admitted the complicity of the Japanese state in the comfort women system) to avoid a further deterioration in South Korean-Japanese relations.

8. In Malaysia, Obama eloquently advocated the American ideals of human rights, freedom and democracy. He noted: “Here in Malaysia, this is a majority Muslim country. But then, there are times when those who are non-Muslims find themselves perhaps being disadvantaged or experiencing hostility”.
9. In Manila, Obama affirmed US commitment to defend its Filipino ally as “ironclad”. But no promises were made to support Manila militarily in its territorial dispute in the South China Sea with Beijing.
10. The Chinese view of US “rebalancing” is that this will embolden US allies to confront China leading to further tension and instability in East Asia.