

**The U.S. Rebalance to Asia through the  
Eyes of Neoclassical Realism:  
Maintaining the Order in  
the Asia Pacific amid  
the Rise of China**

by

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## **Certification**

I, Sek Sophal, hereby declare that this master thesis is my own work which contains ideas and information from published as well as unpublished works of different scholars who are recognized through the references listed in the thesis. The main arguments and ideas that are not cited are ideas and agreements written by author of this thesis.

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## **Abstract**

The U.S. rebalance to Asia announced in 2011 by the Obama administration is a remarkable turning point of the U.S. foreign policy to the Asia-Pacific. The U.S. rebalance to Asia, however, is understood differently by different people from different background. The liberals, for example, see the rebalance as an ongoing engagement of the United States with China. The realists, however, see the policy as the U.S. tough diplomacy to contain the rise of China.

Although several previous researches have discussed the rebalance for years since its announcement, those researches tend to analyze the shift in the U.S. foreign policy based on general theories of international relations. Not many of them have so far offered a more precise theoretical explanation of the U.S. rebalance.

The thesis argues that the U.S. rebalance is theoretically explained by realism. Given the U.S. selective engagements under the policy of the rebalance, this thesis argues that the rebalance is the U.S. strategy to maintain order in the Asia-Pacific amid the rise of China. While seeking to maintain the regional supremacy in the Asia-Pacific, the United States tries to avoid confronting China in a direct way. The thesis argues the United States is seeking to increase its relative power against China. Thus, the U.S. rebalance to Asia is best explained by neoclassical realism.

## **List of Abbreviations**

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| ADMM Plus | ASEAN Defense Ministerial Meeting Plus  |
| AIIB      | Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank  |
| AOR       | Area of Responsibility  |
| ARF       | ASEAN Regional Forum  |
| ASAT      | Anti-Satellite  |
| ASBMs     | Anti-Ship Ballistic Missiles  |
| ASCMs     | Anti-Ship Cruise Missiles   |
| ASEAN     | Association of Southeast Asia Nations   |
| A2/AD     | Anti-Access/Access Denial   |
| BRICS     | Brazil, Russia, India China and South Africa  |
| CBMs      | Confidence Building Measures  |
| CCP       | Chinese Communist Party   |
| C4ISR     | Command, Control, Communications, Computers,<br>Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance |
| EAS       | East Asia Summit  |
| ECS       | East China Sea  |
| FTA       | Free Trade Agreement  |
| GWOT      | Global War on Terrorism   |
| HA/DR     | Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief   |
| IISS      | Institute of International Strategic Studies  |
| IMF       | International Monetary Fund   |
| IPRs      | Intellectual Property Rights  |
| NDB       | New Development Bank  |
| LCSs      | Littoral Combat Ships   |
| PACOM     | Pacific Command   |
| PLA       | People's Liberation Army  |
| PLAAF     | People's Liberation Army Air Force  |
| PLAN      | People's Liberation Army Navy   |
| QDR       | Quadrennial Defense Review  |

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| R&D     | Research and Development                         |
| RIMPAC  | Rim of the Pacific                               |
| RMAAs   | Revolution in Military Affairs                   |
| SALT-II | Strategic Arms Limitation Talks-II               |
| SCS     | South China Seas                                 |
| S&ED    | Strategic and Economic Dialogue                  |
| SLOC    | Security of Sea Lines of Communication           |
| SIPRI   | Stockholm International Peace Research Institute |
| SOEs    | State-Owned Enterprises                          |
| SSGNs   | Guided Cruise Missile Submarines                 |
| TAC     | Treaty of Amity and Cooperation                  |
| TPP     | Trans-Pacific Partnership                        |
| UNSC    | United Nations Security Council                  |
| WB      | World Bank                                       |
| WMD     | Weapon of Mass Destruction                       |
| WTO     | World Trade Organization                         |



# **The U.S. Rebalance to Asia through the Eyes of Neoclassical Realism: Maintaining the Order in the Asia-Pacific amid the Rise of China**

We are in the remarkable position of not wanting to quarrel with anybody because we have got most of the world already or the best parts of it and we only want to keep what we have got and prevent other from taking it away from us. (the statement of delivered by Britain's First Lord of the Admiralty in June 1934 cited in Scheweller,1998, p. 24)

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **1.1. Overview of Sino-U.S. relations and Rebalance**

In December 2011, the last convoys of the American troops finally left Iraq crossing the border to Kuwait where the preparations for the complete withdrawal were ready to bring the men and women in uniforms back home after almost a decade of war. The same is happening in Afghanistan. Even though the Afghan war is still going on, the fact is that it has already reached a transitional period. Leaving Afghanistan is just a matter of time. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq started in 2001 and 2003 respectively seem to be the longest wars in the history of the United States except for the Cold War. As the two protracted and unfortunate wars were waning, it looks like the interests of the United States are no longer in the Middle East as it used to be during the previous U.S. administrations.

The shift in the U.S. interests and foreign policy, in fact, came to exist since the first day of new U.S. administration when President Obama took office in January 2009. The recognition of the growing significance of the Asia-Pacific became clear when Hillary Clinton, then the U.S. Secretary of State started her first Asia trip to Japan, Republic of Korea and China in February 2009 right after being confirmed by the Senate as Secretary of State. The importance of the trip was highlighted in the sense that neither Europe nor the Middle East is central to the new U.S. foreign policy in the new dynamic of international politics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The key interests of the United States now are in the Asia-Pacific region. As former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (2011, p. 56) wrote in her article of *America's Pacific Century* in 2011 “the future geopolitics is decided in Asia, not in Afghanistan or Iraq, and the United States should be right in the center of the actions.”

The changes of the American foreign policy went beyond its traditional region of Northeast Asia to Southeast Asia and South Asia. The United States became the first non-ASEAN member to appoint an Ambassador to ASEAN, and also became the first non-ASEAN member to appoint the first resident Ambassador to ASEAN in 2008 and 2011 respectively. President Obama also became the first American President to attend ASEAN-led East Asia Summit (EAS) in 2011. As India has emerged as one of the fast-growing economies in Asia, the strategic links between the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Oceans become even more crucial, given the

growing trends of the flow of energy and goods through the Indian Ocean. Thus, the United States has upgraded its diplomatic relations with India, and encouraged India to “act East” rather than “look East” (White House, 2011). The shift in the American foreign policy was even noticeable after President Obama, during his visit to Australia in November 2011, announced the policy of the U.S. *Pivot to Asia*, which was renamed the U.S. *Rebalance to Asia* (White House, 2011).

Historically, the U.S. national interests have long been embedded in the Asia-Pacific region. This is not to recall the history when the first American ship *Empress of China* sailed from New York to Guangzhou in China in 1784 soon after the American Revolution (Shambaugh, 2013b, p. 11). For the security interests, the United States fought three major wars in the Asia-Pacific during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, five of the U.S. security allies are in the Asia-Pacific. After the end of the Cold War, the United States still maintains its regional security architecture of the hub-and-spoke system, which has empowered its bilateral security alliances and forwards military deployment. The United States has permanent bases in both South Korea and Japan with thousands of troops. For economic interests, the Asia-Pacific region is home to key trading partners of the United States. They are China, Japan, South Korea, India, Australia, and countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Even though the Asia-Pacific region is of importance for the U.S. interests, the shift in the U.S. foreign policy took place amid the growing economic and

security tensions between China and the United States. As a matter of fact, the Sino-U.S. relations are categorized as cooperative and competitive. On the economic side, the United States and China are locked in economic interdependence. America is the most important market and source of investment for China, while America enjoys taking advantages of investment in China and cheap Chinese products. On the political and security side, however, the relations are very competitive. The United States and China has differences over a wide range of issues ranging from trade and currency policies, freedom and human rights to military modernization and transparency to name a few. These issues are subject to controversial discussions among the U.S. and the Chinese policymakers.

As the 21<sup>st</sup> century has begun, the Sino-U.S. relations have become even more important but not less competitive. China is rising economically, diplomatically and militarily. China's economic development is a miracle in the sense that it has enjoyed double-digits of uninterrupted growth for 30 years. According to Wayne M. Morrison (2015a, p. 1), China is one of the fastest growing countries in the Asia-Pacific region with the average annual growth rate about 10 % from 1979 to 2014. The Chinese diplomacy has been promoted regionally and internationally enabling China to become a key player in the international politics. For example, China started to engage with regional institutions, such as ASEAN and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) shortly after the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s. In 1997, China became a strategic partner of ASEAN before becoming the first

non-ASEAN member to accede to ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in 2003.

As one of five members of the fast-growing economies of BRICS (an acronym representing an association of the fast-growing economies that is made of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), China has come up with a number of initiatives to create international institutions to promote economic cooperation. In 2015, for instance, China initiated to establish the Shanghai-based New Development Bank (NDB). In early 2016, another bank was created. It is called the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Moreover, China has lately initiated the Silk Road project, widely known as a mega infrastructure project to link China to Southeast Asia and the Middle East under the name of *One Belt, One Road*. It is noticeable that among these initiatives, China is the biggest contributor.

Empowered by the steady economic growth, China has rapidly modernized its military power. China's defense budget has increased dramatically from year to year. According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) (2014, p. 173), China's military spending increased up to 62 % from 2004 to 2013. In 2004, China's official defense budget was only US\$ 63 billion. By 2009, the defense spending was increased to US\$ 129 billion before reaching US\$ 171 billion in 2013 (SIPRI, 2014; p. 232). With such an increase, China has become the second largest country to spend on the military after the United States.

However, the rise of China is closely connected to the growing tensions and strategic mistrust between the United States and China. First and the most important factor is the security reason. The United States has perceived modernization of the Chinese military power as a security concern for the U.S. military posture in the Asia-Pacific. According to the 2010 and 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) (Department of Defense, 2010, p. 37; Department of Defense, 2014, p. 17), the U.S. Department of Defense clearly expressed deep security concerns related to the Chinese military modernization, given the lack of transparency and unclear ultimate goal of the military modernization. More importantly, the development of Anti-Access/Access Denial (A2/AD) capabilities of China has posed a serious security threat to the U.S. military bases and freedom of navigation of the U.S. Navy in the Pacific Ocean (Department of Defense, 2010, p. 32). The development of Anti-Ship Ballistic Missiles (ASBMs), Anti-Ship Cruise Missiles (ASCMs), and submarines, for instance, are believed to aim at deterring American carrier strike groups from entering the contested area in the Western Pacific.

Moreover, China's space and cyberspace programs are even more harmful to the U.S. security. In 2007, China successfully tested its direct-ascent anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons. This is a remarkable turn of China's development of military technology, and this contributes to China's Anti-Access/Access Denial (A2/AD) capabilities. China's People's Liberation of Army (PLA) is believed to have

closely observed and been impressed by the significance of information technology warfare in the first Gulf War, the war in former Yugoslavia, and the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. PLA Senior Colonel Wang Baocun, an expert on information technology and cyber warfare at the PLA affiliated Academy of Military Sciences, acknowledged that the PLA closely monitored the progress of the first and second Gulf Wars in terms of strategic and tactical operations employed by the U.S. military in combat missions (Cheng, 2011, p. 158).

Similarly, a group of experts in security studies at Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College argued that even though China strongly opposed the bombing campaign by NATO in former Yugoslavia, China paid a very close attention to the military operation of NATO in terms of a new Revolution in Military Affairs (RMAs), the awesome presentation of air power, and the integration of information technology warfare (Scobell, Lai, & Kamphausen, 2011, p. 9-10). In what is called “informatized warfare,” June Teufel Dreyer observes:

The key to victory would no longer involve the integration of land, sea, and air forces on a three-dimensional battlefield; instead, war would be fought on a five-dimensional battlefield comprising land, sea, sky, space, and electromagnetic spheres embedded in a network-centric context (Dreyer, 2011, p. 38).

China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) is impressed by operational integration: Command, Control, Communication, Computer, Intelligent, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (C4ISR). The PLA, however, sees C4ISR as both a strength and weakness. Technological advancement has given advantages to military warfighting power, while dependence on technology represents a weakness of the military in case of unexpected interruption of the integration process. China understands this problem well. China's development of anti-satellite missiles is the clear evidence. Once the U.S. satellite is shot and destroyed, troops on the ground, fighter jets in the sky, and warships in the sea will be blind. In this context, the U.S. military, particularly the U.S. Navy, is subject to vulnerability, should its integration operation is interrupted by the adversary's cyber attacks.

A second factor contributing to the growing tensions between the United States and China is economic issues. Even though China and the United States share the same common interests of economic gain, it does not mean that their economic relations are smooth. Henry Kissinger (2011, p. 494), a former U.S. Secretary of State and a key architect of the Sino-U.S. normalization process, pointed out that the common economic interests China and America share are interpreted based on different perspectives. This is obviously true, given their differences over trade policies and regulations. For example, China has taken advantages of currency undervaluation to weaken the American export competitiveness in the markets where Chinese products are relatively much cheaper than those of



America. Equally important, China has paid less attention to the protection of intellectual property rights (IPRs) highly demanded by the United States. The vast majority of Chinese business organizations, if not all, has illegally used foreign technologies, and innovations to produce and sell their productions around the world. To respond to this, America has imposed restrictions on sales of high-tech products to China. America, however, has paid the high price for this strategy since imposing such kind of restrictions also limits the American business opportunities to export its products to sell in the international markets.

A third factor contributing to the tensions in Sino-U.S. relations is their differences over political ideology. The universal values of democracy, human rights, and freedom have long been central to the U.S. foreign policy. The long-term political engagement and economic incentive were the U.S. policies of choice with the hope that as China becomes richer, China will become more democratic. In the wake of Shanghai Communique in 1972, the U.S. politicians and the U.S. experts in Chinese politics believed that China would be integrated into the international system empowered by the Western values, and it was likely that the growing China will be freer and more democratic (Bernstiein & Munro, 2003, p. 2).

The same was true to the projection of former Japanese Prime Minister Yoshida that the perspective of economic interdependence between Japan and China would certainly shape the behavior of the Chinese government (Green, 2014, p. 201).

However, half is true. China became prosperous after the integration, and the projection of economic interdependence between Japan and China by Prime Minister Yoshida is perfectly correct, but China has never adopted any Western political value as wished by the United States and Japan.

From the crackdown on the students protesting at the Tiananmen Square, a series of arrests of dissidents and pro-human rights activists, the censorships of internet freedom, democracy, and other issues of human rights abuses remain the subjects of controversial relations between the United States and China. A fluctuation of the Sino-U.S. relations with regard to the promotions of democracy should be articulated by the most recent cases during the first term of the Obama administration.

The first disagreement emerged when President Obama hosted the visit of Dalai Lama. During the visit to China in 2010, President Obama was told by his counterpart, Chinese President Hu Jintao, that China would be unhappy if the United State welcomes the visit of Dalai Lama (Bader, 2012, p. 71.). Referring to the “core interests” of China, any meeting with Dalai Lama from Beijing’s perspective is simply a diplomatic gesture to recognize the existence of “Greater Tibet” beyond an autonomous zone in Chinese sovereignty (Bader, 2012, p. 75). Chinese Ambassador Zhou Wenzhong, according to Bader (2012, p. 74), threatened that the decision of Washington to host Dalai Lama could result in a cancellation of the trip of President Hu to attend Nuclear Security Summit in the

United States. Even though President Hu did not cancel the trip to Washington after President Obama hosted Dalai Lama, Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi and State Councilor Dai Bingguo, as Bader (2012, p. 76-77) revealed, sharply criticized the U.S. decision during his private conversation with them.

Second, it was the case of Chen Guang Cheng, a blind lawyer and a human rights activist who successfully escaped from house arrest in Shandong province, and managed to sneak into the American embassy in Beijing in April 2012. Helping Chen, whose leg was injured while he was attempting to cross the house gate to escape, is consistent with the American commitments to universal values of human rights and freedom. However, the American values, as Secretary Clinton recalls in her memoir (2014, p.84-85), were in dilemma whether the United States should help Chen, and take the risk of losing the chance to have an important annual Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S&ED) with China.

Chinese authorities were quickly aware of Chen's presence at the U.S. embassy in Beijing and demanded the embassy handover Chen to the Chinese authorities. Cui Tiankai, who was later appointed as a Chinese Ambassador to the United States, warned of serious consequences of the U.S.-China relations if the problem was not properly solved. Cui reportedly has threatened the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell during their private discussion: "turn Chen over to us immediately. If you really care about the U.S.-China relationship, that is what you'll do" (Clinton, 2014, p. 88). Although the negotiation was finally reached

between the United States and China on the ground that Chen would go to the United States where he was admitted to studying law at the New York University, the case is an example of how the controversial human rights issues affect Sino-U.S. relations.

The last and the most controversial issue is Taiwan. The U.S. commitments to democracy, and pressure of domestic politics, and law have obligated the United States to protect Taiwan from being militarily invaded by China. The U.S. sales of weapons to Taiwan, of course, have been strongly protested by China bringing the U.S.-China relations down. For example, a US\$ 6.4 billion long-awaited sale of arms package was approved by President Bush in October 2008, just months before he left the office. In early 2010, President Obama authorized another sale of arms to Taiwan. None of the arms sales has gone unopposed by China.

As China's economy continues to grow, so does the progress of its military modernization. In addition to the rapid and massive military build-up, which is causing a security concern for its Asian neighbors, China has become even more assertive in the recent years when dealing with maritime territorial disputes in both the South China Sea (SCS) and the East China Sea (ECS). China has aggressively expanded the areas of its military operation and patrol in the contested zones. The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), for instance, forcibly took control of the Scarborough Shoal from the Philippines in 2012. In the same year of 2012, the long-standing unsettled territorial disputes of

Senkaku/Diaoyu in the ECS between China and Japan became a flashpoint again when Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara announced that he would like to buy, and nationalize the islands into the properties of the Japanese government. Soon after that, the tensions started to grow. China's PLAN, People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF), and coast guard have increased their patrol missions around the disputed islands. The PLAAF has many times illegally entered Japanese airspace prompting Japan to scramble its fighter jets to intercept, and push China's PLAAF out of its airspace.

It looks like there is no sign of any retreat from the Chinese military forces. In contrast, the trends of assertiveness of PLA keep growing. Japan's Air Self-Defense Force in 2014, for example, scrambled their fighter jets to intercept Chinese planes for 400 times (Reynolds, 2015). In the South China Sea (SCS), China successfully constructed the artificial islands and built military bases where at least one of the two runways is ready for Chinese planes to land and take off. As Robert D. Blackwill and Kurt M. Campbell (2016, p. 17) have pointed out in their recent report, China has so far conducted at least 17 times of land reclamations on some reefs in the SCS in less than two years. A 3,000-meter long runway, for example, was completely constructed on Fiery Cross Reef, and another similar runway is under the construction on Subi Reef.

The rise of China has become a subject of debates in the United States. A rising China is perceived differently by a different group of people. From the

perspective of liberalism, the roles of the military are limited by the economic interdependence (Keohane & Nye, 2003, p. 239). The interests generated by economic cooperation will prevent states from going to war against each other. Some liberals, such as Robert Sutter and Russell Ong acknowledge that there are competitions between the United States and China, but argue that the gains from cooperation between the two countries can outweigh the negative impacts (Sutter, 2010, p. 275; Ong, 2012, p. 146). Economic interdependence and a number of common security issues, such as North Korea's nuclear program, terrorism, the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and piracy are important to shape Sino-U.S. relations not to escalate into wars (Ikenberry, 2013, p. 72). The competitions, according to John Ikenberry (2013, p. 57), are taking place in the current international system as China is rising within the system with no intention to challenge the existing order. Ikenberry is optimistic that the Westphalian system is still practical, and it will manage security stability.

On the contrary, those believing in realism are pessimistic about the rise of China. According to realism, when a state becomes more wealthy, it tends to build up its army and seek to change the existing status quo, which is not in its favor (Gilpin, 1981; Schweller, 1999, p. 2). Within this context, the armed conflict is highly likely. Some realists including John Mearsheimer, Aaron Friedberg, and Michael Green are concerned about the rise of China, given the growing security tensions between China and the United States, and fears that the tensions will escalate into a war between the rising power and the existing hegemonic power. John

Mearsheimer (2001a, p. 57, 401; 2006, p. 162), for example, argued that China is not a status quo state. Thus, if China keeps rising, its area of interests will expand. China will develop its own version of the Monroe Doctrine to push the United States out of the Asia-Pacific. Sharing the same bed and having different dreams, economic interdependence and constructive engagement cannot shape China's foreign policy (Mearsheimer, 2001a, p. 57-58; Friedberg, 2011, p. 38; 2012, p. 55; Green, 2016, p. 16). The growing assertiveness of China is a clear evidence of the realist argument. In this context, the U.S. engagement strategy does not work effectively.

At the beginning of the Obama administration, Michael Green (2009, p. 17), a senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and an associate professor of international relations at Georgetown University criticized both the Clinton and Bush administrations for not having strong Asia policy. Green (2009, p. 18) argues that China's military modernization has gone far beyond what is needed for deterring Taiwan independence, and posed threats to the American military posture in the Asia-Pacific. As China continues to rise, realists have called for a stronger and tougher policy toward China (Mearsheimer, 2001b, p. 401-402; Friedberg, 2007, p.43).

As the debate between realists and liberals is going on, the announcement of the U.S. rebalance to Asia by President Obama in 2011 signified a remarkable turning point of the U.S. foreign policy in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. The U.S. rebalance, as

the U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton outlined (2011, p. 58), covers “six key lines of actions:”

- (1) Strengthening bilateral security alliances;
- (2) Deepening our working relationships with emerging powers, including China;
- (3) Engaging with regional multilateral institutions;
- (4) Expanding trade and investment;
- (5) Forging abroad-based military presence;
- (6) And advancing democracy and human rights.

Based on the key lines above, the U.S. rebalance is made of prescriptions of both realism and liberalism. However, it looks like the U.S. regional engagement is more selective in terms of security cooperation with the allies and strategic partners, negotiations of free trade agreement, and promotion of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which exclude China. The implication of this exclusion is that balance of power is at work. The U.S. rebalance to Asia is, therefore, realism. While there are variants of realism, the thesis argues that the U.S. rebalance to Asia is best explained by neoclassical realism.

## **1.2. Research Objectives**

- 1.2.1.** To examine why the United States adopted the rebalance as its new foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific.



- 1.2.2. To contribute to existing literature in the field of international relations, particularly the U.S.-China relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- 1.2.3. To find out what theory of international relations can best explain the rebalance.

### 1.3. Research Questions

1.3.1. *Primary research question:* Why the U.S. rebalance to Asia is best explained by neoclassical realism?

1.3.2. *Secondary research questions:*

1.3.2.1 Why did the United States adopt the rebalance to Asia?

a. What are the interests of the United States in Asia and how can the United States maintain its interests?

b. Is the U.S. military strategy in the Pacific changed by the rebalance?

### 1.4. Research Methodology

The research is conducted in the form of qualitative research, and based on both primary and secondary data. For the primary data, information will be collected from official institutions such the U.S. Department of Defense, Department of States and the Ministry of Defense of China and Japan. Equally important, the information of statistics of trade and economic cooperation will be collected from

official sources such International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank (WB), and the U.S. Census Bureau. For the secondary data, the research will use the existing literature such as books, journal articles, working papers and newspapers.

In order to carry out this research, doing the literature review is the first and most important step. As mentioned in the background above, the rebalance literally matches policy prescriptions of both realism and liberalism. However, it seems that the rebalance is theoretically realism rather than liberalism, given the U.S. selective engagements in the region that discriminate against China. In the Chapter Two, I will first review the literature for general concepts of realism. Next, I will discuss the debates of each variant of realism. Finally, I will examine the rebalance in the light of theoretical predictions of the variants of realism.

In Chapter Three, I will answer the first secondary research question: *why did the United States adopt the rebalance to Asia?* I argue that the shift in the American foreign policy to the Asia-Pacific is driven by the growing economic and security interests of the United States in the Asia-Pacific. The promotion of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the conclusion of the new U.S.-Japan security guidelines, and the expansion of the U.S. strategic partnerships with some Asian countries are the evidence to prove the reasons why the United States shifted its foreign policy to the Asia-Pacific.

In Chapter Four, I will analyze which variant of realism best explains the rebalance. In order to do so, I depend on the debates of each variant of realism in the literature review part of Chapter Two. Also, I will answer the secondary research question: *Is the U.S. military strategy changed by the U.S. rebalance?* I argued that the U.S. military strategy is not driven by the announcement of the U.S. rebalance policy. In fact, the U.S. defense posture had changed years before the rebalance was announced in 2011. In the concluding chapter, I will wrap up the arguments and explain briefly why neoclassical realism best explains the U.S. rebalance to Asia. Also, I will highlight some of the research gaps that this thesis leaves unanswered.

### **1.5. Research Significance**

None of the past great powers has maintained its ever-lasting dominant role in the history of international politics. The rises and the falls of great powers, therefore, are common cycles. Managing the rising power, however, is not common and easy. Some cases of the rising powers ended up with wars. The Peloponnesian War, the Napoleonic War, the First and Second World Wars, for examples, were fought by the rising powers seeking changes in the international system. The pattern of the current Sino-U.S. relations seems to make no difference from the competition between the rising power and the established power, given the rise of China in the system dominated by the United States. However, what makes Sino-U.S. relations unique is their special relations, in which cooperation and competition for the sphere of influence take place at the same time.

Several researches of the U.S. foreign policy towards China under the U.S. rebalance to Asia have been done. However, many previous discussions paid more attention to the evolution of the U.S. foreign policy to China during the Obama administration rather than tracing back to see some changes of the U.S. foreign policy toward China prior to the Obama administration. Changes of the deployments of the U.S. naval assets, for example, were initiated in the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review. Similarly, the current Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S&ED) between the United States and China is originally from the Strategic Economic Dialogue initiated during the Bush administration.

Moreover, some researchers have discussed the rebalance based on the general theories of international relations. Some see the rebalance as a containment strategy (White, 2012, p. 28; Kurlantzick, 2015, p. 5; Macausland, 2015, p. 69). Of course, it is realism. Some others see the rebalance as an engagement strategy, which is supported by liberalism (Shambaugh, 2013a, p. 22; 2013b, p. 17; Ikenberry, 2013, p. 72; Bateman, 2015, p. 71). However, not many of them have given a more precise theoretical explanation to the rebalance.

This thesis agrees that the U.S. rebalance is theoretically realism. Realism, however, is quite broad, given its variants of classical realism, neorealism, and neoclassical realism. In order to explain the rebalance in a comprehensive way, a more specific theoretical explanation is needed. Therefore, the significance of this research is: first, to construct a much clearer image of the rebalance by offering a

theoretical explanation in neoclassical realism, which has been left unanswered by the previous researchers; second, to examine if the changes of the U.S. military strategy are driven by the U.S. rebalance to Asia.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

In this chapter, I will start first by reviewing the general concepts of realism because understanding the general concepts of realism provides me the fundamental basis and advantages to examine the three variants of realism: classical realism, neorealism and neoclassical realism in a more critical way. Next, I will examine the U.S. rebalance through the lens of realism.

### 2.1. Basic Concepts of Realism

Realism is one of the prominent theories of international relations. Realism, however, has three main variants. They are classical realism, neorealism and neoclassical realism. Even though each variant offers a different theoretical explanation, there are some significant assumptions that every variant of realism shares in common. The first assumption is *state* (nation-state) as an actor in the international system (Waltz, 1979, p. 95; Mearsheimer, 1994-95, p. 10; Morgenthau, 2006, p. 4). Studying the Western political thoughts in the ancient time, a political scientist Robert Gilpin (1996, p. 7) makes a good conclusion that “the fundamental idea of realism is Aristotle's observation that man is a political animal. Men find their being as members of social groups to which they give their loyalty and for which they are willing to die.” In other words, people do not confront each other individually, but in a group within a unified society. *State*, therefore, is an actor.

The second assumption is the *state of anarchy*. As Mearsheimer (1994-95, p. 10) argues a nation-state is an “independent political unit in the international system.” There is no higher structure of power than a nation-state. With the absence of world government, the international system generates anarchy, uncertainty, and sense of mistrust. Living in such an anarchic environment, as Waltz (1979, p. 111) argues, states must rely on their own means to survive, and that is a “self-help” system. Anarchy, as Waltz (1979, p. 114) pointed out, does not only mean there is no world government, but also disorder and chaos. “Self-help” is then an important action states need to depend on whatever means and resources they have to protect their own security.

The third assumption is that *inter-state relations are prone to conflicts*. Even though states cooperate in the international system, competitions do not entirely disappear. Cooperation, in a realist thought, is possible if such cooperation gives states the relative gains (Waltz, 1979, p. 105; Mastanduno, 1991, p. 80; Mearsheimer, 1994-95, p. 12). In this context, states keep struggling to compete with each other to maximize their interests. The balance of power, therefore, becomes a law of nature (Morgenthau, 2006, p. 179; Waltz, 2000, p. 27). As Nicolas Spykman argues “a world without struggle would be a world in which life had ceased to exist” (cited in Schweller & Priess, 1997, p. 6). Whether conflicts are driven by the human nature or the consequences of interactions between states in the international system as classical realists and neorealists argue in their

debates (which I will discuss in the section of theoretical debates), the conflicts, in the realist thought, are inevitable.

The last important assumption is *power* as the fundamental factor of international politics. In a letter to respond to his friends, Marcus Tullius Cicero, a Roman philosopher and politician simply asked “for what can be done against force without force?” (cited in Waltz, 2001, p. 159). Realism believes that the final resolution of the conflicts is the use of force. Since each nation-state has its own military power, we can never be sure if we will not be attacked by others sometime in the future. Thus, the only way to survive is to maximize the power (Mearsheimer, 1994-95, p. 12; Morgenthau, 2006, p. 29).

In short, although there are different variants of realism, the concepts of states as actors, the system of anarchy, international relations as sources of conflicts, and the power maximization are all the basic assumptions that all realists share in common. While the different variants of realism provide different theoretical explanations in different contexts, examining the critical debates of each variant of realism is fundamentally important to analyze state’s foreign policy.

## **2.2. The Debates of the Three Variants of Realism**

Even though the three variants of realism share a number of key assumptions in common, disagreements still exist. The “disagreements within the realist tradition,” as Schweller and Priess observed (1997, p. 6-7), “arise from basic



philosophical differences, from placing emphasis on different assumptions or, more often, from varying interpretations of the preceding assumptions.” The different view of power, for instance, is a good case to compare. Classical realists argue that power is the ultimate goal of states (Morgenthau, 2006, p. 10). Neorealists, however, argue that power is not the ultimate goal, but just means to maintain security. In the system of anarchy, the ultimate goal of states is to maximize the security to survive (Waltz, 1979, p. 126; 1990, p. 34-36). Within this sense, a comprehensive analysis of state’s foreign policy is impossible unless and until we understand the disagreements among the three variants of realism.

### **2.2.1. Classical Realism: Domestic Politics Drives States’ Foreign Policy**

Classical realism is one of the key theories in international relations. The assumptions of classical realism are basically drawn from sociology and history, particularly from the Western European history (Taliaferro; Lobell & Ripsman, 2009, p. 19-21). The primary conception of classical realism is central to the human behavior in the state of nature. Individual perceptions of people, therefore, is an essential driving force of state’s foreign policy.

In the state of nature, as classical realism argues, the human nature is bad, selfish, cruel and untrusted. According to Thomas Hobbes (1998, p. 82-83), men were equally born, and this equality leads to equal freedom to compete for interest, security, and reputation. In the state of nature, people tend to have conflict when they want the same thing, which they cannot share in common. Living in the state

of anarchy, security is what people concern the most. Hobbes (1998, p. 84) argued that “out of civil states, there is always war of everyone against everyone.” That is why people sacrifice some of their freedom to live in a civil state in exchange for security protection. As a French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau argues, in the state of nature even farming is not possible for people. The disorder of society caused by the human nature makes it possible that whoever comes first can harvest the crops cultivated by other people (cited in Waltz, 2001, p. 171). As time passes for centuries, the human nature does not change, and it will remain unchanged in the future. It is true. As Morgenthau observes:

Human nature, in which the laws of politics have their root, has not changed since the classical philosophies of China, India, and Greece endeavored to these law. Hence, novelty is not necessarily a virtue in political theory, nor is old age a defect (Morgenthau, 2006, p. 4)

In the history of the Peloponnesian War between the two most powerful Greek city-states, Thucydides (1998, p. 481) argues that “war is waged by interest, pride, and fears.” The rise of Athens, as Thucydides wrote, was then perceived by Sparta as a looming threat to its interests and security. Similarly, even Kenneth Waltz, a prominent supporter of neorealism, agrees that state’s foreign policy is partly influenced by man’s behavior. To explain the human behavior, which is known as the First Image in his book *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis*, Waltz (2001, p. 16) argues “the locus of important causes of war is found in the

nature and behavior of man. Wars result from selfishness, from misdirected aggressive impulses, from stupidity.”

While all of these are discussed to reflect how the human nature or domestic politics matters in state’s foreign policy, it is important to emphasize that the human nature in this context refers to the perceptions of statesmen rather than people in general. Waltz (2001, p. 80) carefully clarifies “To that the state acts is to speak metonymically. We say that the state acts when we people in it act, just as we say that the pot boils when we mean that the water in it boils.” Even though states are actors in the international politics, states cannot make foreign policy on their own, but states’ political leaders do (Schweller, 2006, p. 47). Based on this, the perceptions of the President, Prime Minister, Ministers, military commanders, and other people involving in decision-making process matter in states’ foreign policy. Thus, state’s foreign policy is driven by domestic politics.

Equally important, classical realism sees interstates relations as a zero-sum game. To put in a simple term, classical realism believes that “my loss is your gain, and my gain is your loss.” Thucydides once famously said “the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must” (Strassler, 1996, p. 352). The state of nature has never liberated people from such an untrusted environment. As Rousseau argues:

It is quite true that it would be much better for all men to remain always at peace. But so long as there is no security for this, everyone, having no guarantee that he can avoid war, is anxious to begin it at the moment which suits his own interest and so forestall a neighbour, who would not fail to forestall the attack in his turn, at any moment favourable to himself, so that many wars, even offensive wars, are rather in the nature of unjust precautions for the protection of the assailant's own possessions than a device for seizing those of others (cited in Lipson, 1984, p. 15).

With the absence of higher authority to guarantee security and order, a reciprocal cooperation is highly unlikely. If we treat someone as a friend, that person may or may not treat us back as a friend, but if we treat someone as an enemy, that person will become our enemy.

To defend his position not to launch a policy to contain China after Deng Xiaoping ordered the crackdown on a peaceful protest at the Tiananmen Square in 1989, Joseph Nye (2013, p. 13), then an Assistant Secretary of Defense during the Clinton Administration, argues that the United States cannot contain China for two reasons: “if we treated China as an enemy, we were guaranteeing an enemy in the future. If we treated China as a friend, we could not guarantee friendship, but we kept open the possibility of more benign futures.” Nye’s argument reflects an important point, which is central to concerns of classical realism, the unreciprocated cooperation.

As Mearsheimer (1994-95, p. 13) points out, even though realism focuses fundamentally on power competition, it does not mean that inter-state cooperation is impossible. States, in fact, are concerned that their partners will finally get a greater share of relative gains from the cooperation. Classical realism, according to Mearsheimer, considers the relative gains as cheating in state cooperation.

The case of Strategic Arms Limitation Talks-II (SALT-II) is a good case to study. Opponents of the treaty argued that the treaty gave the Soviet Union more advantages than the United States, given the lack of mechanisms to monitor the compliance of the Soviet Union, and the difficulties to conduct on-site inspections of some specific weapon systems (Lipson, 1984, p. 16). On surface, SALT-II gave the United States a great deal of advantages for national security as the nuclear arsenals were significantly reduced. Technically, it did not. The lacks of technical mechanisms to fully inspect the implementation of the treaty gave the Soviet Union technical advantages not to fully comply with the agreed principles. In other words, there were rooms for the Soviet Union to cheat. In principle, it seemed that the United States was winning the game. In reality, the United States was not.

All in all, the key assumption of classical realism is state of nature, in which human nature is selfish, cruel and untrusted. While classical realists discuss state's foreign policy, they make it clear that states cannot make foreign policy

themselves, but their governments do. The perceptions of statesmen matter in states' foreign policy. Equally important, selfishness of human being and the absence of world government generate the state of anarchy and insecurity. States, therefore, must depend on their own means for security and survival. Inter-state relations, in the view of classical realism, are zero-sum games. Maximizing the power, of course, is the only thing a state can do to survive.

### **2.2.2. Neorealism: International System Drives States' Foreign Policy**

Another variant of realism is neorealism. Even though neorealism derived from classical realism, the views of the two theories over the issues of international politics are different. For example, the state of anarchy, from the perspective of classical realism, is caused by unchanged human nature struggling for power and interests (Morgenthau, 2006, p. 179). However, neorealism argues the state of anarchy is caused by the absence of world government in the international system, in which states interact (Waltz, 1979, p. 114). In this section, I will discuss the key concepts of neorealism, and examine how neorealism views the international politics differently from classical realism.

First, unlike classical realism, which argues state's foreign policy is driven by domestic politics, neorealism argues that state's foreign policy is driven by state's interactions in the international system. By distinguishing the three images, Waltz provides an excellent level of analysis of state's foreign policy. In the First Image, Waltz (2001, pp. 16; 80-81) acknowledges that human nature matters in

foreign policy. However, he argues further that everything is based on human decision, and humans are influenced by several motives. If so, assuming that humans are “single-minded” as “economic maximizers,” is not accurate (Waltz, 1990, p. 27). Therefore, in order to explain things in a more comprehensive way, Waltz suggests that it is important to look beyond the human factors. Waltz argues that the Second Image, domestic political system, is also relevant to state’s foreign policy. Capitalist countries, for example, support free trades, while Socialist countries view free trades as another form of exploitation, given their disadvantages in free trades.

The Second Image, according to Waltz (2001, p. 125), is that “the internal structure of states determines not only the form and use of military force but external behavior generally.” The ideological competition between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, for example, took place due to the different domestic political system. The United States perceived the Communism as threat. For example, in 1953, Richard Nixon, then the U.S. Vice President, claimed that people could have lived in a peaceful world if there were no Communist threat (cited in Waltz, 2001, p. 157). The ideological competition is the evidence of how different domestic political system matters in a state’s foreign policy.

Even though the First and Second Images are relevant to state’s foreign policy, they are domestic politics. Hence, they have less influence on states’ foreign

policy. However, the Third Image, the international system, is different. The international system, according to Waltz (1990, p. 29), is defined by two important factors: “the ordering principles of the system,” and “the distribution of capability across units.” The state of anarchy is generated when a state interacts with other states within the international system. Because states have a different level of power, their relative power distributions in the system constrain them from doing some certain things. This is how the international system reshapes states’ foreign policy and that is the core value of Waltz’s Third Image.

Second, the concept of power as means and ends are also differently viewed by classical realism and neorealism. As briefly mentioned above, classical realism sees power as the ultimate goal, but neorealism sees power as means for security, the ultimate goal of state. Maximizing the power does not always guarantee state’s survival because having too much power is as dangerous as having too little power. “Weakness,” according to Waltz (1990s, p. 36), “may invite an attack that greater strength would dissuade an adversary from launching. Excessive strength may prompt other states to increase their arms and pool their effort.” A coalition of states in Europe, for instance, was formed to stop the expansion of French Emperor Napoleon in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Two similar coalitions were formed to stop German expansions in both First and Second World Wars. That is why power is not the ultimate goal, but security is.

The third issue that classical realism and neorealism have a different view is the



concept of “capability.” When classical realism discusses the term “capability,” according to Schweller and Priess (1997, p. 7), it tends to see capabilities as a relative power distribution of power between state and state rather than the relative power distribution among states within the international system. Waltz (1990, p. 34) points out that classical realism sees causes and effects of state’s foreign policy run in “one direction” from state’s interaction to the result of the interaction.

In contrast, neorealism sees the causal relations run in “two directions.” The states’ capabilities are not just a relative distribution of power between state and state, but also a relative distribution of power among states within the international system (Waltz, 1990, p. 34; Schweller and Priess, 1997, p. 7). In other words, classical realism sees relative power as relations between state and state, while neorealism sees relative power as not just relations between state and state, but also relations that a state has with other states in the international system.

Finally, different from classical realism focusing on the absolute gains, neorealism argues that if the absolute gains are not possible, states are still willing to cooperate if they can get a greater share of relative gains. Waltz contends:

When faced with possibility of cooperating for mutual gain, states that feel insecure must ask how the gain will be divided. They are compelling to

ask not “Will both of us gain?” but “Who will gain more?” If an expected gain is to be divided, say, in the ratio of two to one, one state will use its disproportionate gain to implement a policy intended to damage or destroy the other (Waltz, 1979, p. 105).

The unequal gains generated from cooperation among states will enable states gaining a greater share of relative gains to have more political power than other states. While no security guarantee is available in the anarchic international system, the more state gains, the more security it has.

### **2.2.3. Neoclassical Realism: Domestic Politics, International System, Gaps in Relative Gains Drive States’ Foreign Policy**

Thucydides said “the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must,” for more than two thousand years ago (Strassler, 1996, p. 352). During the wars in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, French Emperor Napoleon once famously said that “God stand at the big battalion,” (cited in Nye, 2011, p. 25). In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Mao Zedong, who was then leading the people’s revolutionary war in China, was quoted as saying “political power grows from barrel of guns” (Wei, 2002, p. 229).

As time passes, there is no doubt that material resources remain the fundamental power parameter of state’s foreign policy. However, the causal relations linking power to the foreign policy making process are not clearly articulated. In other words, it is not clear how power can change a state’s foreign policy. Seeking a

middle way between classical realism and neorealism, neoclassical realism manages to fill this gap by offering a theoretical explanation of causal relations between power and states' foreign policy.

Not different from classical realism and neorealism, neoclassical realism shares the common sense of the anarchy in the international politics, security and state's survival. However, neoclassical realism, according to Gideon Rose (1998, p. 146-147), argues that the causal relations between power and foreign policy are central to the perceptions of political leaders over their relative power or resources and the systemic pressures. To put it in a simple term, neoclassical realism argues that both perception and the system pressures matter in a state's foreign policy. We might not fully understand power if we fail to understand what people are thinking about their relative power and the external environment. Rose, who coined the term of neoclassical realism in 1998, argues:

The scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative power capabilities. This is why they are realist. However, the impact of such power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex, because systemic pressure must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level. This is why they are neoclassical (Rose, 1998, p. 146).

Although classical realism and neorealism are important theories for international politics, both theories have their own weaknesses. Classical realism, for example, focuses mainly on domestic politics. The “pure unit-level explanations,” as Rose (1998, p. 148) points out, are insufficient to analyze states’ foreign policy simply because states with the similar political system do not always do the same things. The United States and Britain, for instance, are democratic states, but Britain’s foreign policy expansions are not as active as those of the United States. In addition, analyzing states’ foreign policy by focusing purely on domestic politics, as Waltz (1990, p. 27) argues, seems to be misguided in the sense that we assume that men are single-minded, while they are not.

Neorealism, on the contrary, pays attentions largely to the systemic structure and gives less significance to domestic politics. Neoclassical realism, however, argues that paying attention to “systemic factors alone is bound to be inaccurate much of the time” (Rose, 1998, p. 152). Fareed Zakaria (1998, p. 187) argues “nations do not formulate and implement foreign policy and extract resources to that end, governments do.” “State-centered realism,” as Zakaria calls, is about the behavior of statesmen as decision makers to influence foreign policy. Neoclassical realists believe that analyzing states’ foreign policy is not only about how the international system changes, but also about how the changes within the international system are perceived by political leaders. The translations of the changes, as neoclassical realists argue, are certainly a product of unit-level intervening variables, in which perceptions of decision makers and state’s

domestic politics matter in foreign policy making processes.

In addition to linking the perceptions and the systemic pressures together, neoclassical realism also concentrates mainly on states' relative power. "By making relative power as their chief independent variable," neoclassical realists argue that neoclassical realism does not seek security maximization as "the highest end" like neorealism does (Waltz, 1979, p. 126), but neoclassical realism reacts in response to the growing uncertainties and anarchy in the international system by seeking greater control to shape the uncertain external environment (Rose, 1998, 152). Theoretically, neoclassical realism is a status quo strategy that a hegemonic state applies in order to maintain its existing leadership in the current system. As Rose portrays:

Regardless of the myriad ways that states may define their interests, this school argues, they are likely to want more rather than less external influence, and pursue such influence to the extent that they are able to do so. The central empirical prediction of neoclassical realism is thus that over the long term the relative amount of material power resources countries possess will shape the magnitude and ambition – the envelope, as it were – of their foreign policies: as their relative power rises states will seek more influence abroad, and as it falls their actions and ambitions will be scaled back accordingly (Rose, 1998, p. 152).

In fact, both classical realism and neorealism do discuss relative power

distribution. Nonetheless, they see relative power distribution in different ways. Classical realism sees the relative power distributions as a form of the balance of power between state and state, while neorealism sees the relative power distributions as a form of the balance of power among states in the international system. Neither of them discusses how the changes in relative power, particularly the changes accumulated in the long run, will shape a state's foreign policy. Waltz (1979, p. 105), indeed, came very close to discussing the relative gains as he wrote that when states cooperate, they do not simply ask "will both of us gain?" but they tend to ask "who will gain more?" Waltz, however, failed to explain clearly how the changes in relative gains affect a state's foreign policy in the long run.

In addition to the unit-level intervening variables, neoclassical realism concentrates on another intervening variable, the changes of state's strength (changes of power and material resources). In his book *From Wealth to Power: the Unusual Origins of America's World Role*, Fareed Zakaria (1998, p.5) observes that the U.S. foreign policy did not expand much before 1890 even though the United States by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century might have already become one of the three or four richest countries in the world. The main reason, as Zakaria argues, is because "policymakers fail to perceive the shift in their country's relative economic position." Within this sense, the expansion of state's foreign policy depends on not only changes of relative power but also the perceptions of political leaders over the changes.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, U.S. President John Quincy Adams warned “country should not go abroad in search for monsters to destroy.” The U.S. foreign policy, however, reversed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when President Woodrow Wilson decided to go to war to make “the world safe for democracy” (Rose, 1998, p. 169). These changes, according to neoclassical realists, were driven by the increase in relative power the United States acquired for decades between the Adams and Wilson administrations (Rose, 1998, p. 170). Brian Rathbun (2008, p. 301-302) argues that “power is powerful only if it can be used, and power can be used only if it can be mobilized.” Mobilizing the power is what states are expected to do to have a political unity in order to respond to the external environment through foreign policy designs and implementations. Neoclassical realism offers an explanation how domestic politics is connected with state’s foreign policy. That is why the U.S. expansion of foreign policy took place in the early 1900s, but not sooner than that.

In neoclassical realism, the term “relative power” does not mean just *how much* power a state has, but it also means *how well* the power can help a state to survive and lead the system in the long term perspectives (Snidal, 1993, p. 172). Waltz (2000, p. 27) wrote that the balance of power is not the things that states do for today, but for tomorrow. This is simply because realist theory can only predict that if the balance of power is interrupted, it will be naturally restored at sometime in the future. Unfortunately, realist theory cannot say when exactly the balance of

power will come. Since states are not sure about other's intention in the future, they have to pay attention to the cooperation to observe how the increase of power of their partners will shape their foreign policy (Grieco, 1993, p. 128). Mastanduno summarized the concept of relative power as:

Relative position matters because nation-states exist in anarchy, without a higher governing authority. Anarchy breeds fear and distrust, leading nation-states to worry, at the extreme, that they will be conquered or destroyed by their more powerful counterparts. Even if nation-states do not fear for their physical survival, they worry that a decrease in their power capabilities relative to those of other nation-states will compromise their political autonomy, expose them to the influence attempts of others, or lessen their ability to prevail in political disputes with allies and adversaries (Mastanduno, 1991, p. 78).

However, the sensitivity of relative gains sometimes limits the possibilities of cooperation among states. According to Grieco (1990, p. 44-45; 1993, p. 128), states will reject cooperation, even though they are guaranteed to get benefits from the cooperation if that cooperation gives their partners a greater share of relative gain. The sensitive of relative gains might even put more pressures on states to give up their gains in absolute term if, by doing so, they can narrow the gaps in relative gains favoring their partners (Grieco, 1990, pp. 44-45; 1993, p. 128; Mastanduno, 1991, p. 79). The sensitivity of relative gains, according to



neoclassical realism, stems from a state's concerns that the gaps in relative gains that its partners get at the current time can lead to the changes of its partner's relative power in the long run. If so, its partners will be able to depend on the increases of relative power to change their foreign policy, and become its adversaries in the future.

In short, neoclassical realism seeks middle ground to fill out the incomplete image that is left by neorealism. Although Waltz is still strongly defending his Third Image, the system of international politics, he concludes that a comprehensive understanding of international politics is not possible unless and until First and Second Images are incorporated. Waltz acknowledges:

The Third Image describes the framework of world politics, but without the First and Second Images there can be no knowledge of the forces that determine policy; the First and Second Images describe the forces in world politics, but without the Third Image it is impossible to assess their importance or predict their result (Waltz, 2001, p. 238).

Neoclassical realism sets up connections between classical realism and neorealism by emphasizing unit-level variable and changes in relative power. Instead of trying to maximize the security, neoclassical realism, of which relative power is chief independent variable, reacts in response to the uncertainties of the external environment to maintain the existing leadership in the system. Neoclassical

realism, by definition, is a strategy of status quo.

|                      | Basic arguments   | View of domestic politics                 | View of international politics            | Factors to influence on state's foreign policy  |
|----------------------|---|---|---|---|
| Classical realism    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Human nature</li> <li>-State's relation as zero-sum game</li> <li>-Power as ultimate goal</li> </ul>  | Very important for state's foreign policy | Less relevant to state's foreign policy   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-State's foreign policy is driven by domestic politics.</li> <li>-Anarchy is caused by human nature.</li> </ul>  |
| Neorealism           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-International system shapes state's foreign policy.</li> <li>-Power is not the ultimate goal but means for security.</li> </ul>                                   | Less relevant to state's foreign policy   | Very important for state's foreign policy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Foreign policy is driven by state's interaction in the international system.</li> <li>-Anarchy exists due to the absence of world government.</li> </ul>        |
| Neoclassical realism | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Pure unit-level is not enough.</li> <li>-Pure concentration of systemic pressure is inaccurate.</li> <li>-Relative power as chief independent variable</li> </ul> | Important for state's foreign policy      | Important for state's foreign policy      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-State's foreign policy is driven by both domestic politics and international structure.</li> <li>-Cooperation is possible, given the relative gains.</li> </ul> |

Table 1: Classical realism, neorealism, and neoclassical realism

### **2.3. The U.S. Rebalance in Realist Thought**

As the U.S. rebalance to Asia marks the shift of the U.S. foreign policy from Europe and the Middle East to the Asia-Pacific, the shift took place amid the growing political and security tensions in the Asia-Pacific, largely due to the rise of China and its growing assertiveness in maritime territorial disputes. From the perspectives of China, the U.S. rebalance is a Cold War-style containment strategy designed to prevent China from rising. This kind of argument is misguided. First, the U.S.-China relations have been locked in a complex economic interdependence. Second, containment cannot be implemented alone by the United States, but by a coalition of allies and friends like it did to the Soviet Union during the Cold War (Nye, 2013, p. 39). Since China is rising and becoming a key trade partner for many countries including the U.S. allies and friends, forming a coalition to contain China is not likely.

It has been years that the United States has implemented its engagement policy with China. The complex economic interdependence, as the United States believes, is a key foreign policy tool to shape China's behavior. The United States, for example, supported China to become a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001. Integrating China into a global institution such as WTO is clearly a sign that liberalism works for the U.S. foreign policy.

While economic incentive is important for the United States to shape China's behavior, it does not mean that China will act as the United States wishes. As Susan Shirk (2007, p. 34), a former Deputy Assistant Secretary at the U.S. Department of State during the Clinton Administration, argues "economic interdependence breeds caution, but it does not guarantee peace." The growing assertiveness of China, as Huge White observes (2012, p. 104), is the evidence that economic incentive does not lead to political changes in China.

Furthermore, the more the United States accommodates China, the more China sees it as the U.S. weakness. According to Phillip Saunders (2014, p. 160), efforts by the Obama administration to intensify the bilateral cooperation and integrate China into the global system, in which China is expected to play a more important role, is misperceived by China as the sign of the decline of America. Saunder (2014, p. 164) argues further that the engagement strategy is not effective in the sense that the more America offers China concessions, the more China asks for. A "new type of great power relations," for example, is the evidence that China is seeking an equal status in international politics as the United States.

However, the United States cannot just accommodate China. Even though the United States cannot contain China from rising, it does not mean that the United States will let China rise unchecked. The exclusion of China from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) signaled that liberalism does not work effectively for the U.S. foreign policy toward China. On the contrary, this exclusion is a sign of

balancing against China. Thus, I argue that the U.S. rebalance to Asia is theoretically explained by realism.

However, there are three variants of realism. I will analyze which variant of realism offers the best explanation for the U.S. rebalance in Chapter Four. In order to analyze the U.S. rebalance in a more critical way, it is important to find out the reasons why the United States shifted its foreign policy. Thus, defining the U.S. interests in the Asia-Pacific is necessary. All of these issues will be discussed in Chapter Three.

## **Chapter Three: the U.S. Interests and Its Relevance to the Rebalance**

The shift in the U.S. foreign policy to the Asia-Pacific through the policy of rebalance to Asia is sign that the United States recognizes that the Asia-Pacific region has become more important for the United States. According to the “six key lines of actions” laid out by the U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (2011, p. 58), the rebalance is a policy designed to protect and advance U.S. economic, security and diplomatic interests that have long been embedded in the Asia-Pacific. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the U.S. interests in the Asia-Pacific and what policies the United States has implemented under the rebalance.

### **3.1. Economic Interests**

It has been decades since the conclusion of the Second World War in 1945 that the Asia-Pacific has maintained its steady and prosperous economic growth. Even though the growth rate was sometimes affected by power competitions during the Cold War and the financial crises notably in 1997 and 2008, the region has still managed to generate growth. In the early 1990s, the Asia-Pacific accounted for only 20% of world’s total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (IMF, 2010, p. 6). In 2000, the region’s share of world GDP increased to around 30%, and by 2014 almost 40% (IMF, 2015a, p. 1). With this rapid economic growth, the Asia-Pacific accounted for two-third of the global economic growth in 2014.

As the region grows, it needs greater attentions from great powers including the United States. The conclusion of the U.S.-Korea free trade agreement (FTA) in 2012 stood out as one of the remarkable developments of the U.S. bilateral FTAs with key Asian nations in the early phase of the Obama administration. In addition to the U.S.-Singapore and the U.S.-Australia FTA that were signed in 2004 and 2005 respectively, the U.S.-Korea FTA will give the United States more opportunities to expand its economic cooperation with South Korea, one of the key security allies in the region.

While Europe is still struggling to recover from its financial crisis, the Asia-Pacific, which was also affected by the global financial crisis in 2008, managed to recover faster and its economies remain stronger than any other region in the world. According to the International Monetary Fund (2015b, p. 53), the growth rate of the Asia-Pacific in 2014 is 5.6 %, which is the highest rate compared with the growth rate of other regions. More importantly, the growth rate of the Asia-Pacific is positively correlated to that of the United States. By 2013, according to Scot Marciel (2013), a former U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, the growth of Asia generated 2.8 million jobs for the American people as part of the U.S. exports.

As indicated by the trends, it is pretty clear that the Asia-Pacific will remain the engine of growth for more years to come. Based on these trends, the United States has promoted the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a high-quality free trade



agreement, in which 12 countries are members. They are the United States, Japan, Canada, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia, Peru, and Chile. Concluded in early 2016, the TPP, if it comes into force, will account for 40% of the world's total GDP. The TPP, as expected, will then be a premier trade system in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **3.2. Security Interests**

The rapid economic growth in the Asia-Pacific comes along with the growing security challenges that need to be properly managed. Maintaining the balance of power and the regional stability, as Robert Ross (2013b, p. 25) argues, is the optimal goal of the U.S. grand strategy since the end of the Second World War. The regional stability and security in this context are not just to prevent wars and other forms of armed conflicts, but also to prevent other states from rising as a regional hegemon to challenge the U.S. regional supremacy. To do so, the United States has maintained its hub-and-spoke system in the Asia-Pacific by deploying its military forces and accessing to bases hosted by its allies, such as Japan and South Korea. Such military deployments are strategically important for the United States to deter aggressive powers, assure security for the allies and friends, and maintain its regional security supremacy.

The U.S. regional security supremacy, however, is being challenged by the rise of China for two reasons. First, China's economic miracle with the thirty-year of uninterrupted double-digit economic growth rate has enabled this country to

develop its military rapidly. A rapid, but less transparent defense spending growth, however, has caused security concerns over the real purposes of China's military modernization. In 2013, for example, the defense spending announced by the Chinese government was US\$ 119.5 billion. The U.S. Department of Defense, however, believes that the figure is inaccurate, given a large number of China's military modernization programs. China's real defense spending, according to the estimation of the U.S. Department of Defense (2014b, p. 43-44), exceeded US\$ 145 billion. Similarly, in its *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Development Involving the People's Republic of China 2015*, the U.S. Department of Defense (2015, p. 49), believes that the actual defense spending of China in 2015 is no less than US\$ 165 billion rather than US\$ 136 billion, which was announced by the Chinese government.

Second, in addition to the lack of transparency, China has become more assertive and aggressive in the areas of unsettled maritime disputes in the South and East China Seas. China's People Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), for example, forcibly took control of the Scarborough Shoal from the Philippine in 2012. China has just constructed a 3,000-meter long runway on the Fiery Cross Reef and is constructing a similar runway on the Subi Reef near the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea (SCS). Equally important, the Chinese Navy and Coast Guard have increased their patrol missions in the East China Seas (ECS). The Chinese Coast Guard, Navy, and Air Force have frequently violated the territorial sovereignty of Japan. In 2004, for example, a Chinese Han-class nuclear-powered

attack submarine secretly sneaked into the territorial water of Japan (Japan Ministry of Defense, 2014, p. 34). It seems that there is no sign that China reduces its assertiveness. In 2014 alone, for instance, Japan's Air Self-Defense Force scrambled its fighter jets for 400 times to intercept the Chinese fighter jets that were illegally entering the airspace of Japan (Reynolds, 2015).

In respond to the growing security challenges, the United States under the rebalance is committed to strengthening security cooperation with its allies and friends in Asia. First, the United States has strengthened its security cooperation with Japan through a number of mechanisms. The United States successfully encouraged Japan to lift its ban on weapons exports in 2014. This eventually paves the ways for Japan to get involved in global arms market, which gives Japan not only revenues to invest more in its military research and development (R&D), but also a political prestige. More importantly, the United States and Japan successfully concluded the new U.S.-Japan Security Guidelines in 2015. This will allow Japan to play more roles in regional security by deploying its Self-Defense Forces in the Pacific and in the contingencies to help the U.S. Navy, should the U.S. Navy come under an attack.

Second, as part of the rebalance, the United States and Australia reached an agreement on rotational deployments of the U.S. Marines in northern territory of Darwin in 2011. While the deployments are in the process, the number of the U.S. Marines is planned to reach 2,500 by 2017 (Schubert & Purtill, 2015). In addition to

the Marines deployment, the U.S. Air Force is also granted access to the Australian naval base of HMAS Stirling on the Garden Island near the city of Perth.

Third, the United States has concluded an agreement with the Philippines, one of its two security allies in Southeast Asia, to lease a naval base in the Subic Bay under the 10-year lease agreement. In addition to paying annual leasing fee, the United States has put more efforts to help the Philippines improve its military forces by increasing military assistance. From 2002 to 2015, the United States provided the Philippines US\$ 500 million in military budget (Mogato, 2015). This is not to include other types of military equipment, such as patrol boats, and training offered by the U.S. Department of Defense.

It seems that the United States not only rebalances *to* Asia, but also rebalances *within* Asia. As listed in the “six key lines of actions” in her article published by *Foreign Policy* in 2011, the U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton outlined that the U.S. Asia strategy is designed to strengthen cooperation not just only with the traditional U.S. allies, but also with other emerging powers in Asia. It is noticeable that there has been a proliferation of the agreements of the strategic partnership after the rebalance was announced in 2011. Some states in South and Southeast Asia have already become strategic partners of the United States. The U.S.-Indonesia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership was signed in 2010 followed by the conclusion of the U.S.-Singapore Strategic Partnership Dialogue in 2012.

Interestingly, Vietnam, a former arch foe of the United States during the Vietnam War, finally concluded the agreement with the United States to establish the U.S.-Vietnam Comprehensive Partnership in 2013. And lately, the U.S.-Malaysia Comprehensive Partnership was also concluded in 2014.

The strategic partnership is another strategy of the United States to deepen bilateral diplomatic engagements of the United States with the emerging Asian powers. It is noticeable that three of the U.S. strategic partners (Singapore, Malaysia and Vietnam) are members of the TPP. Based on this diplomatic framework, the United States can promote not only economic cooperation, but also closer security cooperation. As part of the strategic partnership, for example, the United States has been granted accesses to the Changi naval base of Singapore where the U.S. Navy has for the first time rotationally deployed two of its Littoral Combat Ships (LCSs), *USS Freedom* and *USS Fort Worth* since 2013. Two more LCSs are planned to deploy in Singapore by 2018. In addition to the rotational deployment of LCSs, the United States has permanently deployed in Singapore a number of its P-8 Poseidons, the modern spy planes for long-range maritime patrol (BBC, 2015).

Furthermore, the U.S. Navy has been granted accesses to ports in Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia for logistic supplies and maintenance. The naval bases of Vietnam, particularly the one in Cam Ranh Bay, which used to be the base of the Soviet Navy during the Cold War, are strategically important for power projection

of the U.S. Navy. Daniel Russel, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, was reported to have openly stated that the strategic value of Cam Ranh Bay is one of the key driving forces to deepen diplomatic relations between the United States and Vietnam (Simon, 2015, p. 589).

Unlike Indonesia, Singapore, Vietnam and Malaysia, the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership was cultivated since the second term of the Bush administration in 2005. The U.S.-India close relations were kicked off after the terror attacks on the United States in 2001. The Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) requires the United States to expand security cooperation with countries around the world. The U.S.-India high profile security cooperation took place in 2002 for the first time since the end of the Cold War, when the Indian Navy as part of its escort mission assisted the U.S. carrier strike groups to navigate from the Indian Ocean to the Persian Gulf during the Operation Enduring Freedom (Mohan, 2012, p. 8).

In 2004, the Indian Navy joined the U.S. 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet to carry out humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) operation when India and some other Asian countries were hit by the deadly Tsunami in 2004. The Indian Navy, for the first time, joined a multilateral military exercise with the United States, Australia and Singapore in 2007. The military exercise was conducted on a large scale with the participation of three aircraft carriers and hundreds of warships. At the end of the Bush administration, the U.S.-India strategic partnership got a new momentum

after the long awaited U.S.-India civil nuclear agreement was finally signed in late 2008 (Ramamurthy, 2016, p. 141).

Strong U.S.-India strategic partnership has become a fundamental basis for the U.S. rebalance to Asia under the Obama administration. President Obama in 2012 called India to act and engage East (Mudi, 2012, p. 5-6). The U.S. Secretary of States Hillary Clinton (2011, p. 60) claims that “the United States is making a strategic bet on India’s future that India’s greater role on the world stage will enhance peace and security.” As a result of closer military cooperation, India in 2012 was invited for the first to join the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC), a large-scale military exercise conducted annually in the Pacific Ocean. Not long after that, the Indian Navy in 2014 was also invited to for the first time to join the Operation Malabar, another large-scale naval exercise conducted annually in the Indian Ocean since 1992.

### **3.3. Diplomatic Interests**

Traditionally, key political leaders of new U.S. administration usually pay their first official visits to Europe. Such kind of the tradition was broken by both Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and President Obama when the two paid their first official visits to Asia in 2009 and 2010 respectively. However, the shift in the U.S. foreign policy to the Asia-Pacific should not be highlighted only by the first trips to Asia by Secretary Clinton and President Obama, but also frequencies of their visits and the growing of U.S. engagements with regional institutions.

President Obama, for example, visited Asia at least five times during his first term, while Secretary Clinton visited Asia for no less than 14 times within her first three years in office. The frequencies of visits by Secretary Clinton made her become the first U.S. Secretary of State to visit all ASEAN member states (Saunders, 2013, p. 5). Similarly, Robert Gates and Leon Panetta, who served as the U.S. Secretary of Defense from 2006 to 2011 and from 2011 to 2013 respectively, paid their official visits to Asia for at least 13 times before they left their office.

In addition to the frequency of official visits, there have been growing U.S. engagements with regional institutions. The United States is the first non-ASEAN member state to appoint its Ambassador to the ASEAN Secretariat in 2008. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton resumed U.S. participation in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 2010 after the former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice skipped it twice on the ground that ARF is less important for security dialogue (Emmers, 2015, p. 147). Moreover, the growing regional engagements allowed the U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates to attend the first ASEAN Defense Ministerial Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus) in 2010. The United States finally acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in 2010 paving the way for President Obama to attend the ASEAN-hosted East Asia Summit (EAS) for the first time in 2011.



The U.S. engagements with regional institutions are very important for the U.S. credibility and regional security assurance amid the growing assertiveness of China over the maritime disputes in the East and South China Seas. The ADMM Plus, for instance, technically concentrates on non-traditional security issues, such as terrorism, piracy, and humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HA/DR). This forum, however, serves some strategic and political interests. First, it touches on non-traditional security issues, which are not sensitive in terms of state's sovereignty. Second, by discussing non-sensitive issues, the forum creates a good environment for confidence building measures (CMBs), in which CBMs can be used as a springboard for the forum to move one step further to discuss other sensitive issues, such as code of conduct for maritime security and conflict settlements. The U.S. presence at the EAS, ADMM Plus, and ARF is diplomatically important for its allies and friends as these engagements are signs that the United States is paying greater attentions to this region where China is rising as a trouble maker.

In short, the growing U.S. interests and challenges in the Asia-Pacific have convinced the United States to pay more attention to this region. With the highest growth rate, the Asia-Pacific will remain the fast growing economy for more years to come. The rise of China, however, will also remain the challenge of the U.S. regional supremacy. The shift of the U.S. foreign policy through the rebalance, however, does not only aim to protect and advance the U.S. interests, but also reassure the U.S. allies and friends amid the rise of China's

assertiveness. The conclusion of new U.S.-Japan Security Guideline in 2015, the agreements of strategic partnerships between the United States and Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam and the growing U.S. engagements with regional institutions are the key U.S. policies implemented after the announcement of the U.S. rebalance in 2011.

## **Chapter Four: The U.S. Rebalance in Neoclassical Realism**

As discussed in Chapter Two, the U.S. rebalance to Asia is theoretically explained by realism. However, since realism has different variants, and each variant offers a different theoretical explanation, it is unclear which variant can best explain the U.S. rebalance to Asia. Equally important, there have been discussions about the changes of the U.S. military structure after the rebalance was announced. For example, the rebalance of the U.S. naval assets –from the current ratio of 50/50 between the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans to 60/40 by 2020 –has been widely discussed as part of the U.S. rebalance to Asia (IISS, 2012). Does the rebalance change the U.S. military structure in the Asia-Pacific? In other words, are changes of the U.S. military posture in the Asia-Pacific driven by the policy of rebalance? Therefore, the purposes of this chapter are to discuss three important issues. First, I argue the U.S. rebalance is best explained by neoclassical realism. Second, because neoclassical realism is closely relevant to domestic politics, I argue that in addition to the perceptions of the U.S. political leaders over the changes in the international structure, the U.S. rebalance to Asia is partly driven by bureaucratic politics. Third, I argue that the rebalance does not change the U.S. military strategy in the Asia-Pacific because the United States had changed its military posture in the Asia-Pacific years before the rebalance was announced.

### **4.1. The Rebalance in Classical Realism**

Balancing politically and cooperating economically, the U.S.-China relations are technically not a zero-sum game. In contrast, both the United States and China have long been locked in economic interdependence. In 1979, the total volume of trade between the United States and China was merely US\$ 2 billion. By 2014, the total trade volume between the two countries has reached US\$ 591 billion (Morrison, 2015a, p. 2). China is now the second-largest trading partner and the third largest export market of the United States. With the growing economic cooperation, China has become the largest foreign reserve holder of the U.S. Treasury bond. By September 2015, China holds US\$ 1.26 trillion of the U.S. Treasury bond in both private and public sectors (Morrison, 2015a, p. 14).

Besides economic interests, the United States and China also share a number of common security interests, such as the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), terrorism, piracy, drug smugglings, human trafficking, climate change to name a few. One clear example is the North Korean nuclear program. As Thomas Christensen (2011, p. 5-7) points out, there are at least three reasons why China does not want North Korea to have nuclear weapons. First, if North Korea has nuclear weapons, it is highly likely that Japan and Korea will follow. Second, if North Korea is armed with nuclear weapons, it will likely seek greater political independence from China. Finally, preventing North Korea from developing its nuclear weapons will not only maintain the status quo in the Korean peninsula but also earn China diplomatic credits to sell its so-called peaceful rise in the international system. It is clear that neither the United States nor China benefits from the North Korean nuclear program. In contrast, both of

them will certainly get benefits if they can cooperate to terminate the nuclear program.

Moreover, the United States and China also share maritime security interests in common. To maintain the security of sea lines of communication (SLOC), for instance, China joined with other countries to conduct the anti-piracy operation in the Gulf of Aden in 2009. The operation marked the first time that China's People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) was deployed far away from their home water. While some naval experts argue that the participation of China's PLAN took place as part of China's strategy to increase its navy's blue-water capabilities, the participation of PLAN contributed to the interests of maritime security that all nations share in common (Erickson & Stranger, 2015, p. 75). The operation in the Gulf of Aden, as a naval analyst Jeffrey Becker (2016, p. 84) observes, served as the fundamental basis for China's PLAN to engage in international naval diplomacy. As a result, the U.S. Navy and China's PLAN conducted their naval exercise in that region in 2013. The close military cooperation, according to Becker, paved the way for China's PLAN to join Rim of the Pacific military exercise (RIMPAC) for the first time in 2014.

Even though the United States and China are locked in strategic mistrust, the ongoing economic and security cooperation that the two countries have are the clear evidence that the U.S.-China relations are not a zero-sum game. As discussed in Chapter Two, by focusing on the absolute gain, classical realism sees

state's relation as a zero-sum game. Classical realism, therefore, has some shortcomings in explaining the U.S. foreign policy toward China.

#### **4.2. The Rebalance in Neorealism**

As the Cold War ended in the early 1990s, the world has become safe in terms of the threats of communism and nuclear attacks of the Soviet Union. However, the concerns of international security, particularly the security in the Asia-Pacific, do not demise along with the Soviet Union. The end of the Cold War, according to Friedberg (1993-94, p. 27-28), is a sign of a polarity change from bipolar to multipolar system, in which none of winners or losers has been identified yet.

The rise of China, for example, comes to exist along with the growing economic cooperation and security tensions over the maritime territorial disputes. This complicated and unclear situation could hardly allow us to define whether we are really living in a real peacetime. Such kind of situation, according to Japan Defense White Paper 2014 (2014, p. 2), is technically called the "grey zone." The growing assertiveness of China in the region has posed security challenges to the U.S. regional supremacy in the eyes of its allies and friends.

The shift in the U.S. foreign policy emphasis on Asia, however, is not solely driven by the changes in the international system, and the rise of China, but also by the perceptions of the U.S. political leaders over those changes, and the notion that the United States is in decline, and the American century is over. The wars in

Iraq and Afghanistan, as former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd (2015, p. 1) calls the “eternal drama for America,” claimed thousands of lives of the American soldiers. The United States spent billions of dollars fighting those endless wars for more than a decade. Furthermore, an unexpected financial crisis erupted in 2008 made the situation worse. The United States and its people are exhausted.

On the other hand, China is rising economically, militarily and diplomatically. Some Chinese officials and academics are even proud of their economic rise and see the 2008 financial crisis as a sign of the decline of the United States and a power shift from the West to the East (Yang & Zhao, 2014, p. 65). Additionally, in an interview with Jonathan Tepperman, a managing editor of *Foreign Affairs*, Cui Tiankai, who was appointed as a Chinese Ambassador to the United States in 2013, clearly said that America is becoming insecure, and its international roles are stagnating, if not in decline, while others (including China) are catching up (Tepperman, 2013, p. 17).

The concerns of the perceptions of the U.S. decline and its diminishing credibility matter to the U.S. political leaders. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, for example, in her famous article *America's Pacific Century*, argues:

In Asia, they ask whether we are really there to stay, whether we are likely to be distracted again by events elsewhere, whether we can make and keep

credible economic and strategic commitments, and whether we can back those commitments with action. The answer is: We can, and we will. (Clinton, 2011, p. 57)

In a statement of regional architecture in Asia delivered at the University of Hawaii, Secretary Clinton (2010) affirmed the position of the U.S. foreign policy that “the United States is back in Asia. But I want to underscore that we are back to stay.” Similarly, Leon Panetta then the U.S. Secretary of Defense, during the Shangri-La Dialogues in Singapore in 2012, clarified the U.S. Asia strategy by saying that “the United States has long been deeply involved in the Asia-Pacific. We were there then, we are here now, and we will be here for the future” (IISS, 2012). More importantly, in his 2016 State of Union Address, President Obama emphasized on the U.S. supremacy and credibility saying:

All the talk of America’s economic decline is political hot air. So is all the rhetoric you hear about our enemies getting stronger and America getting weaker. The United States of America is the most powerful nation on earth. Period. It’s not even close. (in the Final State of Union 2016).

The geopolitical purposes of the rebalance are not only to reassure Asia amid the growing assertiveness of China, but also to project a firm American leadership to show that the two protracted wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the economic crisis did not weaken the American regional supremacy (Sutter, 2014, p. 100). Thus,



the rebalance silences the notion that America is in decline and washes away any misperception and miscalculation about the shrinking of the U.S. leadership in the Asia-Pacific.

In short, the U.S. rebalance to Asia is not driven solely by the changes of geopolitics and the rise of China in the international politics. But the shift in the U.S. foreign policy under the Obama administration is also driven by the perceptions of the U.S. political leaders. If so, it seems that neorealism also has its shortcomings to explain the U.S. rebalance. As discussed in Chapter Two, the key assumption of neorealism is that state's foreign policy is driven by the changes of structure in the international system. Since the rebalance is driven by both the structural changes in the international system and domestic politics, neorealism cannot offer the best explanation for the U.S. rebalance to Asia.

#### **4.3. The Rebalance in Neoclassical Realism**

It is clear that neither classical realism nor neorealism offers the most precise theoretical explanation for the rebalance. However, it is important to emphasize that both are relevant to the U.S. rebalance to Asia. Classical realism, for example, touches upon the perception of the U.S. political leaders, given the notion of the U.S. decline, while neorealism discusses the structural changes in terms of rising China. Thus, it would be fair to give both variants some credits, given their concepts of balance of power.

However, analyzing a state's foreign policy based only on the concentration on either the unit-level variables or the systemic factors alone, according to neoclassical realism, is insufficient. A good analysis of state's foreign policy, as one of neoclassical realists argues, should focus not only on the structural changes, but also how those changes are perceived by states' political leaders because states cannot design and implement foreign policy on their own, but their governments do (Zakaria, 1998, p. 187).

As discussed above, the rebalance is driven by both the structural changes in the international politics and the perceptions of the U.S. political leaders. Based on these, it seems that the rebalance is better explained by neoclassical realism. If so, the questions arise: why and how can neoclassical realism best explain the rebalance? In order to answer these questions, I will look at a number of the U.S. actual policies to Asia after the announcement of the rebalance. Even though the United States is committed to strengthening cooperation in the Asia-Pacific, some of these policies are implemented selectively excluding China. Based on these selective engagements, I will demonstrate how the discrimination of the U.S. policy to exclude China helps the United States maintain its relative power and how these policies support neoclassical realism.

#### **4.3.1. The TPP: From Economic Interests to Economic Leadership**

Two of the "six key lines of actions" of the U.S. rebalance focus on the expansion of trade and investment, and the cooperation with emerging powers in Asia including China (Clinton 2011, p. 58). The actual Asia policy of the United States,

however, is currently implemented discriminately against China. One clear example is the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Although the United States has emphasized the trend of economic growth in the Asia-Pacific, the TPP was finally concluded without China. Technically, the exclusion of China is largely due to the Chinese domestic economic structure. The political reasons behind the scene, however, remain.

First, having no access to the TPP is equal to preventing China from benefiting from the new framework of economic cooperation. The TPP, according to Nina Silove (2016, p. 47), a senior researcher at the Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University, is the U.S. “economic denial strategy” to China. The absence of China would give the United States a great advantage to increase its relative power to dominate the region. Established by 12 nation states with their leading economies, the TPP roughly accounts for 40% of world’s total GDP. This new economic block will create a new trading system representing the model of a high-quality free trade agreement in the Asia-Pacific.

Furthermore, although the United States has repeatedly claimed that China is welcome to join the TPP, the possibility that China manages to join is far from clear in the foreseeable future, given China’s economic structure. One of the most challenging issues is the problem of China’s state-owned enterprises (SOEs). By the time the United States announced its Rebalance to Asia, the number of the key Chinese SOEs has reached 144,700 already (Morrison, 2015b, p. 31). This is not

to include other state-owned financial institutions. By 2011, according to Morrison (2015b, p. 32), China's banking system has largely been controlled by the government. For example, four out of the five biggest banks have already been under 100% control of the Chinese government.

The Chinese SOEs are root causes of unfair competitions that are strongly objected by the TPP's principles. With the intervention from the government, the Chinese SOEs can produce and sell their products at a much lower price, so that other foreign companies cannot compete with. For example, the Chinese SOEs have offered special discounted prices of arms sales to the Ministry of Defense, reducing the real cost of military hardware for the PLA (Bernstiein & Munro, 2003, p. 7). While there might be a strategic reason for the Chinese government to hide its actual defense budget, it is clear that the Chinese government intervenes in businesses. If China can do it now, there is no reason to believe that China will not do it after it is admitted to the TPP.

Second, it seems that the United States might have anticipated that China, in the short to medium term, cannot totally reform its economic structure to fulfill the requirements to become a member of the TPP. It is clear that the majority of the big firms of China is SOEs. The large number of SOEs is the clear evidence that it is very difficult for China to reform its economic structure. According to Morrison (2015b, p. 32), many of the Chinese SOEs have received preferential credits from the state-owned banks, such as low-interest rates, long-term loans, and large

amount of credit lines. Thus, the Chinese SOEs depend mainly on the government financial supports to drive economic growth. Then, once China decides to reform by putting more restrictions on the banking system, China will risk closing the majority of its SOEs because they will fail to meet the bank requirements to apply for loans. China will, of course, lose its competitiveness in the international markets, and the Chinese economy will be severely affected.

In addition, the United States believes that China will do more harm than good if China is admitted to the TPP. According to David Loevinger, a Senior Coordinator for China Affairs at the U.S. Department of Treasury, China was not included in the TPP because the United States knows that not only is China unable to comply with requirements of high-quality trade liberalization, China will in turn slow down the negotiation process of the TPP (Silove, 2016, p. 84). Based on these, it seems that the United States might have anticipated that China would not reform, and that gives the United States a legitimate reason to deny China.

One last important issue is the protections of intellectual property rights (IPRs). China is not committed to taking any serious legal action to protect IPRs. Thus, the problems of IPRs have become one of the most critical challenges in running businesses in China. Pirating has become the culture in China's society, and this is highly unlikely to change in the foreseeable future.

Instead of taking legal actions to protect IPRs, the Chinese government, in some

cases, exercises its political influence to force foreign firms operating in China including some of the U.S. firms to share their technologies with the Chinese domestic firms (Morrison, 2015b, p. 36). This is in addition to other forms of cyber-related theft, in which the Chinese government has been accused by the United States of playing roles in supporting such kind of crimes behind the scene. The U.S. Department of Justice, for instance, issued a 31-account indictment against five PLA officers for their roles in cyber-related theft in May 2014, while President Obama issued Executive Order 13964 to sanction a number of Chinese firms just days before the official visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to the United States in April 2015 (Morrison, 2015b, p. 41-42).

The IPRs are very vital for the U.S. economy because the U.S. economy depends mainly on technology innovations. The intellectual property-related industries (IP industries) have generated more revenues than the non-IP industries. In 2010, when the United States was struggling to recover slowly from its financial crisis in 2010, the IP industries generated 27.1 million jobs, and the IP industries accounted for US\$ 5.06 trillion in value added to the U.S. economy, according to the observation by Akhtar and Fergusson (2014, p. 6). This huge amount of revenues represented more than two-third of the total GDP of the United States in that year.

Since the majority of big firms in China are SOEs, and many of them have long violated IPRs to increase their competitive advantages, complying with the

principles of IPRs as part of the requirements of the TPP is not going to happen soon. If China decides to reform, China's economy will become critically risky because the real implementations of IPRs will certainly kill many of the Chinese SOEs, and a social crisis will emerge if China cannot generate growth. If China decides not to reform instead, it cannot join the TPP. The new trading system, if it comes into force, will then remain under the leadership of the United States. The U.S. leaders are aware that its conditions for China's participation are prohibitively demanding. As President Obama (Obama says TPP, 2015) was quoted as saying "if we don't write the rules for trades around the world, guess what? China will!" The TPP, of course, the U.S. strategy to balance against China in what Ashley J. Tellis (2013, p. 111), a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, describes as taking "advantages in relative power, but without incorporating those components that would spell containment."

#### **4.3.2. The Security Allies and Strategic Partners: Narrowing the Gaps in Relative Power**

Although the United States and China are benefiting from their complex economic interdependence, it does not mean both countries are equally satisfied by the gains. As Kevin Cooney (2009, p. 49) argues, China might be satisfied by the growing American dependence on its cheap products, while it keeps building its military. If this situation continues, as Tellis (2013, p. 110) observes, "the U.S. benefits from its ties to China in absolute terms, but loses in relative terms." The growth generated by the economic cooperation will allow China to continue its

military modernization, which will finally threaten the United States and its allies and friends in the Asia-Pacific.

Such kind of situation has put the United States in a difficult position, in which the Cold War-style containment is clearly not an option. The United States, however, can never let China continue rising unchecked. While the United States cannot contain China, it does not mean that the United States cannot balance against China. But any form of balancing against China should not be conducted in a direct way, but in an indirect way to avoid unnecessary hostility to China (Tellis, 2013, p.111, Silove, 2016, p. 47). The United States needs to strengthen its security cooperation with its allies and strategic partners, while trying to avoid unnecessary direct confrontations with China.

The change of the U.S. position to support Japan in the island disputes in the East China Sea is an example that a direct confrontation is counterproductive for the policy of the rebalance. According to Carlyle A. Thayer (2012), the United States was in the dilemma after Japan decided to nationalize the Senkaku islands for two reasons. First, the U.S. alliance credibility would be affected if the United States ignored not to support Japan's action. Second, if the United States took the position in favor of Japan, as obligated by the spirit of the U.S.-Japan alliance, the United States would have to encounter a higher diplomatic tension with China, and which is inconsistent with the political goals of the rebalance.



In fact, the United States explicitly opposed the plan of the Japanese government since the beginning. However, the Japanese government ignored the U.S. warning. As former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell (U.S. warned government, 2013) recalls, “even though we warned Japan, Japan decided to go in a different direction, and they thought they had gained the support of China, or some did, which we were certain that they had not.”

Japan, which paid a very close attention to the incident of the Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea in the early 2012, does not want to see such kind of an incident happening in the East China Sea. The shift in the U.S. foreign policy to Asia through the policy of the rebalance gave Japan an opportunity to exploit this policy and test the commitment of the United States to its alliance obligations (Thayer, 2012). Although President Obama in 2014 publicly stated that the U.S.-Japan alliance covers the Senkaku islands, it is clear that by 2012, the United States was still taking neutral position, and suggested that Japan and China solve the problem diplomatically. The issue of the Senkaku islands clearly shows that Japan and the United States have the different views of the U.S. rebalance. The United States wants to increase its influence in the Asia-Pacific, while avoiding provoking China. The Senkaku issue, however, forced the United States to take side and risk encountering a tougher diplomatic tension with China.

Another best way that the United States can balance against China without necessarily confronting China directly is to bring a third party into the equation.

Robert Jervis (1978, p. 175) examined the case of the changes in British and French foreign policies to respond to threats from Germany during the Second World War. France and Britain believed that if both of them increased their military power and cooperate with each other, they could more effectively reduce threats from Germany than if they worked individually. Jervis (1978, p. 175) contended “when a state believes that another not only is not likely to be an adversary, but has sufficient interests in common with it to be an ally, then it will actually welcome an increase in the other’s power.”

In other words, if we bring the like-minded states up, although they are currently not our allies, those states will help us to narrow the gap in relative power that is currently not in our favor. This can be applied to the proliferation of the U.S. strategic partners in Asia under the Obama administration. Tellis explains the logic of the strategy to strengthen the strategic partnership:

If the consequential states abutting China—such as Japan, India, Vietnam, Singapore, Indonesia, and Australia, among others—can be aided by U.S. power to realize their strategic potential and to increase their mutual cooperation while deepening their partnership with the United States, the net effect would be to create objective constraints that limit the misuse of Chinese power in Asia (Tellis, 2013, p. 112).

This is a win-win strategy for both the United States and its allies and partners

because they are given “an opportunity to limit Beijing’s capacity for malevolence without sacrificing the common prosperity arising from trade and interdependence” (Tellis, 2013, p. 113).

The rise of the U.S. allies and strategic partners will, to some extent, cost the United States its monopoly of power. Japan, South Korea, India, Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam, and others will have to occupy a greater space of international politics. Their strong economies will have to compete with the United States and other countries including China. But, these states are U.S. allies and strategic partners, who share common interests with the United States. The rise of these states, therefore, will help the United States balance against China in an indirect and effective way without necessarily confronting China directly. According to neoclassical realism, a state is willing to accept a smaller share of gains in absolute terms, if by doing so it can narrow the gap in relative gains favoring its partner (Grieco, 1990, p. 44-45; Mastanduno, 1991, p. 79). If so, the policy of the rebalance to bring Asians up will certainly help the United States narrow the gap in relative gains that is currently in favor of China.

Equally important, cooperation in trilateral frameworks have been growing after the announcement of the rebalance in 2011. In addition to focusing on bilateral security cooperation, the United States has strategically created trilateral security cooperation frameworks with allies and strategic partners. For example, Indonesia was invited to a joint Australia-U.S.-Indonesia trilateral military exercise in 2012.

The United States, Japan, and Australia conducted their trilateral naval exercise 2014. In 2015, the United States, Japan, and India held their trilateral security dialogue for the first time, and the three countries conducted a trilateral naval exercise in March 2016. Such kind of trilateral security cooperation was rare before 2011. With this trend, the strengthening of the security alliance, and strategic partnerships can lead to *de-facto* trilateral security alliances in the Asia-Pacific in the future. The trilateral security alliances would be of great interests for the United States to boost its relative power to dominate the region.

As a Polish-American political scientist and geostrategist Zbigniew Brzezinski (2012, p. 181) wrote in his recent book *Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power*, the United States has involved in the multilateral dimensions of cooperation in the Asia Pacific. Five of its security alliances are in the Pacific. The United States has clearly expressed its political will to support India as a candidate for the membership of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The United States has engaged with regional institutions, such as ASEAN, ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the East Asia Summit (EAS) to name a few. Maintaining this momentum, according to Brzezinski, is the best strategy of choice for America to maintain peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific.

Engaging with strategic partners in Asia has put the United States on the right track for the regional balance of power. As Fareed Zakaria (2008, p. 241-242) argues, the American grand strategy should not follow the British model of

balancing against the rising power as it did to Germany during the inter-war period, because it is deadly dangerous. In contrast, the United States should follow the Bismarckian approach of Germany by engaging all rising powers to have better relations than they have among themselves. By doing this, the United States is in a good position to maintain its relative power and continue dominating the region for more years to come. Although military power is an important tool of state's foreign policy, the United States should "think asymmetrically" that military is not always the best choice to achieve foreign policy goals (Zakaria, 2008, p. 244). Strengthening the strategic partnerships would allow the United States to increase its relative power without using force, which is risky.

William T. Tow (2015, p. 47) moderately argues that the rebalance should not be interpreted as a synonym of a pure balance-of-power strategy. It is about how the U.S. presence in the Asia-Pacific and its power would maintain regional peace and security. This is a win-win policy, from which everyone including China can benefit. As one of neoclassical realist has recently claimed that even though China is excluded from the TPP, door remains open for China to join the TPP whenever it can meet the requirements (which is not expected to happen in the short and medium term) (Rose, 2015, p. 10). That means the United States is still applying engagement approach toward China amid the latter's growing assertiveness and the resulting diplomatic tensions.

#### **4.4. Rebalance in Bureaucratic Politics**

Another reason to drive the shift in the U.S. foreign policy under the Obama administration is bureaucratic politics. As Jeffery Taliaferro (2006, p. 40) argues “foreign policy is made by flesh-and-blood officials.” State’s foreign policy, therefore, is partly influenced by a group of key officials involving in decision-making process. General George Marshall, for example, rejected any plan proposed by the U.S. Department of States to use development aid as an incentive to encourage China to reform its policy, but he supported the same idea only after he was nominated as the U.S. Secretary of States (Jervis, 1976, p. 26).

A similar bureaucratic politics is applied to the shift in the U.S. foreign policy to the Asia-Pacific. Soon after Hillary Clinton was nominated as the U.S. Secretary of States, she recruited her own team for the Asia-Pacific affairs. Some of her key officials are former officials who were in charge of the Asia-Pacific affairs during the Clinton administration. For example, Jim Steinberg, an expert of the Asia-Pacific, who used to serve as the U.S. Deputy National Security Advisor during the Clinton administration, was nominated as the U.S. Deputy Secretary of States. Kurt Campbell, a former senior official at the Pentagon and National Security Council for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, was nominated as the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State. Similarly, Tom Donilon, former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, was nominated as the U.S. National Security Advisor. These key officials played a key role in designing the U.S. Asia strategy.

As Robert Jervis (1976, p. 25) argues “where you stand is determined by where you sit.” Similarly, Margaret Hermann and Charles Hermann (1989, p. 362) point out that “although we recognize that the numerous domestic and international factors can and do influence foreign policy behavior, these influence must be channeled through the political structure of a government that identifies, decides, and implements foreign policy.” The background and expertise of a team recruited by the U.S. Secretary Hillary Clinton during the first term of President Obama indicate that they are architectures of the U.S. rebalance to Asia. The policy is, therefore, partly influenced by bureaucratic politics.

#### **4.5. Is the U.S. military structure in the Asia-Pacific changed by the U.S. Rebalance?**

There have been some remarkable changes in the U.S. military forces in the Asia-Pacific after the announcement of the rebalance in 2011. As briefly discussed in Chapter Three, the deployment of the U.S. Marines to Darwin, Australia, the access of the U.S. Air Forces to the HMAS Stirling Naval Base on Garden Island near the city of Perth in Australia, the deployment of Littoral Combat Ships (LCSs) and P-8 reconnaissance planes to Singapore, and the access of the U.S. Navy to naval bases in Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia as part of its rotational deployment are highlighted as significant changes in the U.S. military posture in the Asia-Pacific. These changes are technically consistent with the announcement by former U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta to rebalance the U.S. naval assets from the current ratio of 50/50 to 60/40 for the Pacific and the Atlantic Ocean respectively (IISS, 2012).

However, the shift of the U.S. military posture under the Obama administration, according to some researchers, is not really new because the United States had restructured its military posture in the Asia-Pacific years before President Obama announced the rebalance in 2011. Robert Ross (2012, p. 76; 2013a, p. 2), for example, observed that in 1997 the U.S. Navy, for the first time since the end of the Cold War, moved a few of its submarines from Europe to stand by in Guam. In fact, the rebalance of the U.S. naval assets was actually initiated years before Panetta's announcement at the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2012. According to the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) (Department of Defense, 2001, p. 27), a report of the U.S. military strategy released in every four years by the U.S. Department of Defense, the United States clearly stated "the Secretary of the Navy will increase aircraft carrier battle group presence in the Western Pacific and will explore options for homeporting an additional three to four surface combatants, and guided cruise missile submarines (SSGNs), in that area." Clearly, the United States not only started rebalancing its naval assets, but also seeking for the homeporting option since 2001, and this is exactly the same to the "rotational deployment" of the U.S. Navy in Singapore, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia today.

Furthermore, the 2001 QDR also discussed U.S. concerns about the security situation in the East Asian littoral region. It explicitly stated:



Maintaining a stable balance in Asia will be a complex task. The possibility exists that a military competitor with a formidable resource base will emerge in the region. The East Asian littoral –from the Bay of Bengal to the Sea of Japan –represents a particularly challenging area (Department of Defense, 2001, p. 4).

The development of the Littoral Combat Ships (LCSs), which are currently operational in Singapore, took place in this context.

The shift of the U.S. naval assets to the Pacific Ocean became even more obvious when the 2006 QDR explicitly articulated the growing regional challenges that require the U.S. PACOM to pay more attention and expand its area of responsibility (AOR). The 2006 QDR addressed the future responsibilities of the U.S. Pacific fleet:

The fleet will have greater presence in the Pacific Ocean, consistent with the global shift of trade and transport. Accordingly, the Navy plans to adjust its force posture and basing to provide at least six operationally available and sustainable carriers and 60% of its submarines in the Pacific to support engagement, presence and deterrence. (Department of Defense, 2006, p. 47)

Based on these trends, the rebalance of the naval assets of the United States is not really a new strategy, given its part of the U.S. rebalance to Asia under the

administration of President Obama. To some researchers, the rebalance of naval assets as stated by Leon Panetta in 2012 is just a rhetorical statement because the policies had taken place well before it was announced (Cossa & Glosserman, 2013, p. 4). The U.S. Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter (2013, p. 15) strongly defended that the rebalance is not a marketing strategy saying “we are not just talking the talk. We’re walking the walk.” However, the evidence vindicates that the changes of the U.S. military posture in the Asia-Pacific had taken place years before the rebalance was announced. It is clear that the changes of the U.S. military are not driven by the U.S. rebalance.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion**

The U.S. rebalance to Asia announced in 2011 under the Obama administration is a remarkable turning point of the U.S. foreign policy at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century emphasizing the changes in areas of interests of the United States in economic, diplomatic and security issues. For the economic issues, it is clear that Asia-Pacific has generated steady growth for decades since the end of the Second World War. At the end of the Cold War, the Asia-Pacific accounted for only 20% of world's total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (IMF, 2010, p. 6). However, by 2014 the Asia-Pacific accounted for roughly 40% of world's total GDP (IMF, 2015a, p. 1). The conclusion of the U.S.-Korea free trade agreement in 2012 and the conclusion of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in late 2015 marked outstanding initiatives of economic cooperation, in which the Asia-Pacific is the most important sources of the U.S. economic interests. Also, the growing U.S. diplomatic engagements with the Asia-Pacific are marked by the growing U.S. engagements with regional institutions in Asia.

The U.S. interests are closely connected with regional peace and stability. In the Asia-Pacific, the United States has maintained its hub-and-spoke system in the Pacific since the end of the Second World War. The U.S. 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet has permanently deployed a carrier strike group in Japan for years. The U.S. regional security supremacy, however has been challenged by a number of critical issues,

such as the North Korean nuclear program and the rise of China, terrorism, piracy to name a few.

However, China, in particular, has caused many security concerns. First, more than three decades of steady economic growth has enabled China to modernize its military in a massive scale. Second, China's military modernization is taking place with less transparency. Third, as China's military grows stronger, China has become more assertive and aggressive when it comes to deal with the unsettled maritime disputes in the East and South China Seas. As the security tensions are on the rise, the United States has been in deep concerns for prospects of regional security. The U.S. rebalance, therefore, seeks to maintain regional peace and stability by strengthening the U.S. security cooperation with the allies and friends in the Asia-Pacific. The conclusion of the new U.S.-Japan security alliance in 2015, for example, is one of the U.S. strategies to strengthen regional security cooperation.

As the U.S. security supremacy is being challenged by the rise of China, the rebalance is the U.S. strategy designed to check the rise of China. Thus, the rebalance is realism. But there are different variants of realism that offer different theoretical explanations. However, I argue that neither classical realism nor neorealism offers a more precise theoretical explanation for the U.S. rebalance to Asia than neoclassical realism. The failure of both classical realism and neorealism to explain the rebalance can be proved by two reasons. First, the

U.S.-China relations cannot be categorized as a zero-sum game. Even though the United States and China are in a political rivalry, the two countries are in an economic partnership. The growing trades and economic cooperation have already locked the two countries in economic interdependence. Because classical realists focus on absolute gains, they tend to see inter-state relations as a zero-sum game. Therefore, the U.S. rebalance cannot be explained by classical realism.

Second, the U.S. rebalance cannot be explained by neorealism, because the shift in the U.S. foreign policy to the Asia-Pacific is not only driven by the structural changes in the international system, but also by the U.S. domestic politics. It is true that the United States under the Obama administration shifted its foreign policy to the Asia-Pacific where China is rising and provoking regional peace and security. However, the rise of China is not enough to explain how the U.S. foreign policy is made. The U.S. political leaders have repeatedly affirmed a strong status of the United States in international politics. President Obama, for example, has recently defended the American supremacy saying:

All the talk of America's economic decline is political hot air. So is all the rhetoric you hear about our enemies getting stronger and America getting weaker. The United States of America is the most powerful nation on Earth. Period. It's not even close. (in the Final State of Union, 2016).

It sounds that the message itself carries an ambiguous statement that the United States is in deep concerns about the notion of the U.S. decline. Then, it is quite obvious that the U.S. rebalance is not only driven the factor of structural change, the rise of China, but also by the perceptions of the U.S. political leaders. Since neorealism argues that state's foreign policy is driven only by structural changes, the U.S. rebalance to Asia cannot be best explained by neorealism.

### **5.1. Why Neoclassical Realism?**

This thesis concludes that the U.S. rebalance to Asia is best explained by neoclassical realism for two reasons. First, according neoclassical realists, analyzing states' foreign policy by focusing solely on either domestic politics or systemic factors is inaccurate. It is undeniable that the changes in the system are important to state's foreign policy, but it is also equally important to understand how those changes are perceived by political leaders.

It is important to reiterate the argument of a prominent neoclassical realist that no states make foreign policy on their own, but their governments do (Zakaria, 1998, p. 187). Neoclassical realism analyzes states' foreign policy by seeking a middle way to link both classical realism and neorealism together. That is the way to construct an immediate link between power and state's foreign policy. As Brian Rathbun (2008, p. 307) concluded, "neoclassical realism is understood as the use of domestic politics to fill out the incomplete picture begun by structural realism." In the words of William C. Wohlforth (2012, p. 40), neoclassical realists are not

motivated by any incentive to construct a universal theory of international politics, but they are interested in looking for the most precise realist school of thought to analyze state's foreign policy "at a given place and time."

Second, unlike classical realism, which focuses on absolute gains, neoclassical realism focuses on relative gains. It is true that neorealism also focuses on relative gains when it comes to discuss relative distribution of power (Waltz, 1979, p. 105). Neorealism, however, did not discuss how the gaps in relative power, if continues in the long run, will change states' foreign policy, but neoclassical realism does. The reason why states are sensitive to the relative gains, according to neoclassical realism, is because states believe that the relative gains favoring their partners will increase their partners' relative power, from which their partners will one day use the relative power to coerce or attack them (Mastanduno, 1991, p. 78).

Through the rebalance, the United State can increase its relative power by at least two main factors. The first factor is the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). The conclusion of the TPP by twelve member states with their leading economies will be a model of a modern free trade agreement in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The TPP will then represent up to 40% of the world's total GDP. The TPP, however, excluded China on the ground that China has yet to fulfill the policy requirements to join this new economic bloc. The exclusion of China, as discussed in Chapter 4, is equal to denying China access to benefiting from the economic cooperation. By

doing this, the United States, as the largest economic power, can slow down the rise of China indirectly, and increase its relative power to continue dominating the region without necessarily confronting China in a direct way.

The second factor is the strengthening of strategic partnerships in the Asia-Pacific. It is important to note that two of the TPP member states (Japan and Australia) are U.S. security allies, while three others (Malaysia, Vietnam, and Singapore) are U.S. strategic partners. The close economic cooperation will allow the United States to strengthen deeper security cooperation with its allies and strategic partners. The U.S. military deployments in Australia and the access of the U.S. Navy to naval bases in Singapore, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia are the outcome of strategic partnerships, and it is strategically important for the power projection of the United States in the region.

In addition to regional power projection, bringing these Asian states up is very useful for the United States to narrow the gaps in relative gains currently favoring China. It is true that if the U.S. allies and strategic partners grow stronger, they will certainly occupy a greater place in international politics. Competitions are inevitable. The United States, however, is still willing to do this, if doing so can narrow the gaps in relative gains of China. As neoclassical realists argue, a state does not hesitate to accept less gain in absolute term, if doing so can help that state narrow the gaps in relative gains favoring its partners (Grieco, 1990, p. 44-45; Mastanduno, 1991, p. 79).



Based on these reasons, I argue that the shift in the U.S. foreign policy through the policy of the U.S. rebalance to Asia under the Obama administration is best explained by neoclassical realism. It might not be possible to stop China from rising, but it does not mean that it is impossible to slow down the rise of China. As Tellis (2013, p. 110) argues we can forget the containment because there will be no return of George Kennan in the U.S.-China relations today, but we cannot forget balancing. China is rising rapidly. However, the problem is not about who is running fast, but who is running faster.

Michael Mastanduno wrote an article published in *International Security* in 1991 asking “do relative gains matter?” This thesis would like to answer: Yes, it does, and it will. Amitav Acharya in 2008 wrote a book of which title asks “The Rise of Asia: Who is leading?” I would like to answer by asking “under the system dominated by who?” The strategic goal of the U.S. rebalance is similar to a statement, which was delivered by Britain’s First Lord of the Admiralty in June 1934:

We are in the remarkable position of not wanting to quarrel with anybody because we have got most of the world already or the best parts of it and we only want to keep what we have got and prevent other from taking it away from us (cited in Scheweller, 1998, p. 24).

In neoclassical realism, the U.S. rebalance is not a strategy seeking to maximize the security, but the rebalance is designed to respond to the growing uncertainties of external environment by seeking greater influence to shape these uncertainties to continue dominating the system. It is likely that China will continue rising for more years to come, but China will continue rising only as a follower, while the United States will continue staying as a leader. The U.S. foreign policy to the Asia-Pacific, as John Ikenberry (2008, p. 33) concluded, “is based on America’s position as a hegemonic and status quo power in the region. It wants continuity more than change, and its security and economic strategies toward the region reflect this reality.” That is why the U.S. rebalance is best explained by neoclassical realism.

## **5.2. Gaps in this Research**

While the main objective of this thesis is to analyze the U.S. foreign policy to China through the policy of the rebalance to Asia, this thesis can only offer a partial theoretical explanation. The gaps in the research remain. First, the U.S.-China relations are dynamic. The changes of the two countries’ relationship are ongoing. This research is written in 2016, which is the last year of the Obama administration. It is not clear who is going to be the next President of the United States, but it is clear that there must be some changes when the new President comes to office. For example, none of the front runners of the U.S. presidential candidates has supported the TPP. With this uncertainty about the future of the

TPP, the future of the U.S. rebalance is an ongoing question for the future researches.

Second, scope and limitation of the thesis do not allow this thesis to offer a comprehensive analysis of the U.S. foreign policy to China. The research focuses only on the U.S. rebalance to Asia, which is the American foreign policy under the Obama administration from 2009 to 2016. Equally important, although the thesis concludes that the U.S. rebalance is best explained by the neoclassical realism, it does not mean that other theories, such as liberalism, constructivism, classical realism or neorealism are irrelevant. For example, in the analytical sections, the thesis discusses the individual perceptions of the U.S. political leaders, which are relevant to both classical realism and constructivism. However, because the research pays attention to the perceptions in terms of variants of realism, it did not pay attention to the perceptions of other theories. Thus, research findings can give a partial explanation in the light of neoclassical realism only.

Third, as the U.S. interests are closely connected to peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific, the issues of the South and East China Seas remain the critical security flashpoints challenging the U.S. interests. China's military base expansions require the United States to pay more attention to, and to work closely with the allies and strategic partners to properly manage the problems.

Forth, countries in the Asia-Pacific have been rapidly building their military. China, India, ASEAN countries and others have increased the defense budget year to year. The defense spending in Asia has surpassed that of Europe since 2012. According to Institute of International Strategic Studies (IISS, 2015, p. 209), the regional defense spending increased from US\$ 270 billion in 2010 to US\$ 344 billion in 2014. The security flashpoints in the maritime territorial disputes, and the rapid military build-up have made the security issues in the Asia-Pacific even more critical. A large-scale armed conflict is possible due to misperception and miscalculation. And all of these problems are subject to further researches in the future.

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