

United States in Asia: Transition in the International System and Restraining China Influence

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Abstract: United States under President Barack Obama administration inherited a poor domestic economic conditions due to the economic crisis in 2008. To deal with this issue, United States government released a foreign policy Pivot to Asia. Officially, this policy is referred as an attempt to balance the foreign policy priorities of the United States that were previously considered too focused in the Middle East region. In addition, the economic growth in Asia led to the increased strategic value of the countries in the region that made the United States more into account regarding the potential of this region. This article analyzes the background and the reason behind the United States decision to getting closer to Asia. Through analysis using international system variables, according to Valerie Hudson, there are several attributes that need to be considered. Each attribute represents the conditions that are seen in the interaction dynamics of the countries at the global level. In addition, through the Long Cycles Theory by Geroge Modelski, United States foreign policy is motivated by the transition and cycles that exist in the international system. Based on this theory, the phase of the current international system is in a state of deconcentration of power leading to new actors. China's economic growth lead to discomfort for the United States as a world power since the end of Second World War. Long Cycles Theory able to explain changes in the international system is able to push the United States to implement a foreign policy Pivot to Asia as an attempt to hold and contain the spread of Chinese influence at the global level.

1 INTRODUCTION

The first decade of US foreign policy in the early 21st century was dominated by anti-terrorism policies, wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the efforts of deterrence and nuclear proliferation in Iran. US foreign policy is a form of response to the hijacking of three commercial aircraft which then crashed into the World Trade Center building in New York and the Pentagon in Washington D. C. and the fourth aircraft that ended up falling in Pennsylvania on September 11, 2001 (Green, 2014). Replacing President George W. Bush with the foreign policy of War on Terror that characterized his leadership, the 44th President of the United States, Barack Obama took a different approach during his reign. President Barack Obama inherited a severe domestic economic crisis early in his tenure. The condition of the US economy in 2008 was one of the worst since the Great Depression that once hit the United States in the 1930s. Improving the domestic economy is the first task that must be done by Barack Obama after inaugurated in early

2009. One of the efforts made by Barack Obama to deal with this problem is to proclaim US foreign policy that pivots on countries in Asia .

The United States solely maintain the international security, political and economic stability since the end of the Second World War. In Asia, the United States' influence in maintaining regional stability and security has had a substantial impact on regional economic developments. Simultaneously the economic malaise experienced by the United States and the recession Hesei that occurred in Japan is inversely proportional to the significant growth experienced by China (Chow, 2014). Although China was not at the time of extreme economic growth, China was able to capitalize on the deterioration of the US economy and use the opportunity as a momentum to expand its influence in the international economy. Economic development and growth in the Asia region also rapidly increasing the strategic value of countries in the Asian region, thus increasing the importance of this region for the United States. The US decision to "return to Asia" is believed to be an attempt to

rebalance US foreign policy priorities that in the previous administration were too focused on the Middle East so as to ignore the Asia-Pacific region.

Entering 2010, the international economy is shifting and Asia offers new opportunities that used by the United States government in the era of Barack Obama to balance the maximum potential of the profits and investments that can be obtained by the United States (Saunders, 2014). The United States economy at one of its lowest points is the reason behind the approach of the United States to the Asian region. It is clear that the United States has a strong motive when deciding on foreign policy orientation under Barack Obama's leadership to incline toward Asian region. One explanation that can be used to explain the background of US's Foreign Policy Pivot to Asia is to use international system level of analysis. The level of analysis of the international system is the highest exploration that can be used to analyze the foreign policy of a country. As an approach at the macro level, the international system is called the stage in foreign policy analysis. Given that each country has its own intentions and interests, the foreign policy response of a country to the current conditions at the global level is not the same as each other. In this paper, the international system exploration is used to analyze the influence of global dynamics and constellation on a global level in encouraging the United States to implement foreign policy that pivots in the Asian region. According to Valerie Hudson (2007), there are six attributes in analyzing foreign policy through international system variables. In addition, the theory of George Modelski (1981) on the cycles and transitions of the international system, is also used to deepen the analysis of US foreign policy.

2 INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM AND FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS

Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye (1977) in their *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* states that no country is isolated in the international system. All countries in the world are connected to each other and related in a system called complex interdependence system. Based on Keohane and Nye's statements, it appears that the international order and interaction patterns can be a factor determining the behavior patterns of international actors. International system exploration can be used to explain it. In analyzing foreign

policy, international system exploration is used when issues raised involve the benefit of all countries in the world. When formulating the country's foreign policy, policy-makers need to shape their priorities. The most important thing to emphasize is that policymakers should take into account how the international environment limits the options of available realistic policies. In addition, they should also be able to recognize opportunities that are present, especially opportunities that can help secure the interests of their respective countries (Breuning, 2007).

Valerie Hudson (2007) explains that there are six attributes in the international system variables. The first thing to note is the number of actors involved in the system. The number of actors becomes a crucial thing because it affects the interaction process that occurs. The less actors involved, the interaction and the responses obtained will be easier to synthesize. Conversely, as more and more actors engage, the interaction process becomes more complicated by considering the existing actors. The second attribute is the distribution of power in the international system. The type of power distribution within the ongoing international system can help categorize the role of the actors involved. This second attribute has links to the third and fourth attributes that is the number of major power states involved as well as the level of adherence to the big country through formal or informal mechanisms. The link between these three attributes can be seen from the situation when the distribution of forces within the international system is centralized. This shows the role of dominant actors who generally have great capabilities that can make other international actors both state and non-state actors to comply with the prevailing international system. The fifth attribute is the role and existence of supranational organizations while the sixth attribute is the issue discussed.

It is possible to use every available attribute and offer a hypothesis on the effect of each value in foreign policy. Maurice East (1978) mentioned that the greater the number and types of issues contested in the international system would be directly proportional to the high bargaining power of a foreign policy. One approach in analyzing foreign policy through international system variables can be done by observing the cycles and transitions that occur within the international system. George Modelski (1981) mentions that the international system undergoes cycle rotation that occurs every 120 years. The beginning of each cycle begins with the attainment of the great power of a particular actor and generally resides in the context of the great

war. According to Modelski, the position of the country in the first phase of this cycle looks strong and the great power state in the international system acts on the common good. The next phase is illustrated by the destruction and spread of power caused by the emergence of rival states. The power monopoly held by great power in the previous stages is divided into rival states thereby lowering the hegemon status of the great power state. The Modelski cycle then continues on the formation of a multipolar system due to the increasingly spreading of forces at the poles within the international system. However, this multipolar system will slowly lead to conflict and once again the international system undergoes a great war mechanism, a country with new powers emerging after the war ends, and the cycle will revolve again.

The four phases of this cycle consist of (1) Global War and the emergence of new Great Power states, (2) World Power, (3) Delegitimization of the World Power, and (4) Deconcentration of Power to Other Actors. Each of these stages lasts for thirty years. Modelski's Long Cycles theory argues that aspects like politics, the military, and the economy, especially the process within the international system, are actually coordinated within the movement of complex structures. A wave of political problems and innovations in various fields coincided with the economic crisis demanding a rearrangement of the military structure and the emergence of new actors at the global level (Modelski, 1981 in Hudson, 2007).

The authors argue that the US decision to pivot on Asia is based on changes in the ongoing international system. Entering the 1970s to early 2000s, the level of US dominance at the global level is relatively declining. The success of post war restructuring after the end of the Second World War brought the global order into the multipolar system. The rise of country with growing capability make the world's attention no longer centered on the United States alone. The 9/11 attacks in 2001 then marked the end of the phase of the United States' delegitimacy in the international system. Based on Long Cycles theory initiated by George Modelski (1981), the international system is currently in the deconcentration phase. China was present as a rival of the United States and managed to show the rapid development in the economic and military by utilizing the momentum that exists. At this stage, the reaction of the United States will center on efforts to maintain power and domination at global level through contestation. Efforts to maintain the status of the United States reflected from its foreign policy

in the era of President Barack Obama with a pivot on Asia. Although the official statement from the United States government says that this policy is aimed at rebalancing the global order, referring to Modelski's theory, the writer views this policy as a US strategy to suppress the influence and dominance of China at the international level.

3 THE RISE OF CHINA AND THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

The end of the Cold War brought a new chapter of history to many countries in the world. The rapid development of technology and science and the growing globalization of the world push the countries of the world to adapt to the changes. The rise of China as the world's emerging great power at the end of the Cold War raises major questions for security and the international order going forward. Avery Goldstein (1998) in his *Great Expectations: Interpreting China's Arrival* mentions that academics, observers, and policymakers are interested in various environmental, human rights, economic, military, security, and other issues that shape the international dynamics of the 21st century must consider China's rise and its implications. The strength of China's position on a global level is not surprising. The international outlook on the status of a great power refers to the fulfillment of three main indicators comprising ownership of a vast territory, abundant wealth of resources, and a large population. China has fulfilled these three indicators and has also met other requirements to improve its influence at the international level.

The revolution of the Chinese Communist Party in the mid-20th century brought new changes in the internal political dynamics of the country. During the Cold War, China's new communist leaders sought to enhance international prestige through their involvement in international bodies such as the United Nations Security Council. Despite attempting to build prestige on a global level, China remained solely on the limits of the "great power" candidate due to the inability of the Chinese communist regime to improve the country's internal conditions. This condition changed in early 1979 when the influence of the Soviet Union was internationally declining, the Chinese communist leaders initiating a series of new reforms that would result in rapid growth in terms of both quantitative and qualitative expansion (Harding, 1987). At the end of the Cold War, China was ten years old at the economic

takeoff stage while successfully completing the final puzzle pieces to obtain a great power predicate. China has economic and expert resources capable of becoming a leader in the international economy as well as preparing the foundation of great military capabilities in the future. Experts and academics who previously predicted China's strength as great power in the future began to worry about the implications it could have on the international order (Lardy, 1994).

Michael D. Swaine (2011) in his book *America's Challenge: Engaging a Rising China in the Twenty First Century* explains that China's domestic economy and its involvement in the global economy contain features relevant to the interests of the United States. Through these features, it is clear that China's actions at the global level are also the reasons why the United States is disturbed as the great power of the world today. There are seven features to be discussed in the next explanation: global interdependence, defense spending, economic relationships with other major powers, large surpluses in the economy, high energy demand, relationships with developing countries, and the provision of economic assistance and other forms of assistance (Swaine, 2011). First, note that China's economic growth depends not only on the pattern of domestic economic growth but also on international trade, investment and technology. For example, between 1980 and 2006, China's international trade as a proportion in gross domestic product or GDP grew from 22% to 71%. In addition, the ratio of imports to China's GDP also increased from 11% in 1980 to 32% in 2007. The same condition is seen in terms of exports of goods and services which contribute most of China's GDP (Bergsten et al., 2006).

The results of China's involvement in the international economy lead to high levels of Chinese participation in international economic institutions and international forums such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Asian Development Bank, the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) and also the G-20. In addition, China also promotes various economic and trade agreements in the Asia and Pacific region. There are seven free trade agreements (FTAs), two economic partnership agreements, and an economic cooperation framework agreement with a total of seventeen countries and two special administrative regions. Sixteen of China's nineteen economic agreements come from countries from Asia and the Pacific (Swaine, 2011). Based on World Bank (2013) data,

the Asia and Pacific region accounts for about 40% of the world's total economic growth. The more aggressive the development of China's economy suppressed the position of the United States as Asian Power since the end of World War II.

The second feature of defense spending is closely linked to China's rapid economic growth and technological innovations that promote an increase in China's military modernization programs. Entering the 2000s, China's defense spending was in the 12% range. In 2010, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Instance (SPIRI), China spent about 114.3 billion US dollars or 2.2% of China's total GDP (Swaine, 2011). China currently ranks both countries with the largest military spending after the United States. The third feature deals with China's economic dependence on international trade that makes it a cooperative relationship with many major countries. In 2002, China surpassed the United States as the world's largest recipient of foreign direct investment. In 2009, China achieved the title as the world's largest exporter and stepped over Germany as the second largest trading country after the United States. China in this case establishes good cooperative relations with EU countries and enhances the interdependence of the economy. The success of China then continued in 2010 successfully overtaking Japan as the world's second largest GDP country. China's influence not only covers the countries of Europe alone but also the big countries in Asia such as Japan and North Korea are known to have good relations with the United States. China's economic maneuver is again a challenge for the United States to maintain its influence in the Asian region (Swaine, 2011).

The fourth feature is seen from the large surplus gained by China. In 2010 alone, China recorded a surplus of 306.2 billion US dollars. Some transactions and assets involved in these transactions use the United States dollar including a trillion dollar asset from U.S. Treasury and other US dollar-based assets (Swaine, 2011). In theory, China can significantly affect the value of the US dollar and this further adds to the United States' vigilance against China. Fifth is the magnitude of China's energy needs to sustain its growth. China's need for raw materials from other countries such as iron, oil, steel, and much more is increasing. Based on data from the International Energy Agency or the IEA, China is the largest energy consuming nation in 2009 beating the United States. The amount and tempo of Chinese imports on raw materials and energy has led many observers to take into account

that Chinese demand can change prices in global markets. China's search for easier resources and raw materials creates stronger ties with countries in Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, Middle Asia, and Southeast Asia. This is the sixth feature in the relevance of China's rise to the world order. In recent years, China has expanded economic cooperation with African countries through G-to-G agreements, exports and imports, natural resource exploration, and investment. In the Middle East, China's dependence on oil from Arab countries has established good economic relations between them. In 2009, China took over the position of the United States as a major exporter of Middle Eastern countries (Bardhan, 2010).

In Latin America, the US hegemony umbrella is still strong but it does not close the success of China in spreading its influence. China is currently Brazil's largest trade partner and Chile and Argentina's biggest trading partner and Paraguay after Brazil. The same is true in Central Asia and Southeast Asia. China since 2009 has become the largest trading partner of ASEAN countries (Swaine, 2011). In the seventh feature, China is present as a country that provides economic aid and other assistance to developing countries in need. This policy makes China gain prestige in the international world. These seven features show how the development of China in the economic field can affect the dynamics that occur in the world order. Having been named a hegemon since the end of the Second World War, the United States sees China's presence as a challenge to its position as the World Power (Mudi, 2014). Hence the US foreign policy under President Obama's administration to get closer to Asia is a form of response to the changing forces taking place at the global level.

4 US PIVOT TO ASIA AND THE RISE OF CHINA

Valerie Hudson's (2007) international system attributes are entirely illustrated in this situation. Number of actors involved was remarkable considering the United States in its policy of applying it to countries in the Asia and Pacific region. However, other countries outside the Asia and Pacific region are also affected indirectly because of the complex interdependence. Conditions like these make interaction more complicated by considering future interests and relationships between the United States and those countries. US

foreign policy to pivoting Asia is a generalization that requires further specification when deciding to do so with certain countries on a bilateral basis. In addition, there are also attributes of power distribution in the international system. At this time, the polarity in the global order is positioned at multipolar. The power that exists is not centralized so that the state has its own role in the international system. The next attribute is number of major power involved, the position of the United States and China is able to maintain and monitor the degree of compliance of other countries in the international system. The existence of international organizations as well as the number of issues discussed also illustrated clearly in US policy to pivot to Asia this. The international system today has a supranational organization over a country that accommodates the interests of many countries in the world. The UN is one of them. The existence of a major power within the UN such as a permanent member of the UN security council for example, is capable of controlling the degree of compliance of other member states. In addition, the UN not only focuses on a single issue in a particular field. There are various issues discussed and this shows that the existing international order can be elaborated through the attributes of the international system by Valerie Hudson (2007).

Changes in the international order due to China's rapid development require the United States to establish foreign policy that can protect its national interests from external threats. Through the theory of George Modelski (1981), the authors were able to analyze that US foreign policy to pivot to the Asian region is motivated by cycles and transitions within the international system. The international system is currently in the deconcentration phase. This phase marks the emergence of many new actors so that the international system becomes multipolar. However, in the midst of this multipolar system, emerging actors rise and challenging the position of dominant power. China in this case present as a rival for the hegemony of the United States. John J. Mearsheimer (2014) calls China "the most important geopolitical development of the 21st century" and has predicted China's economic development will penetrate into the military which is then used to spread its influence on the global level. At a conference in New York in early 2005 titled "Legal Evolution Toward a World Rule of Law: Development of Legality and Constitutional Democracy Worldwide", China was included in the discussion panel as a problematic case with countries from Africa, the Middle East , and Latin America (Peerenboom, 2007).

The problem here is the two views on China. On the one hand, China opens itself to the outside world, building up the domestic economy, infrastructure, and reputation on a global level that is increasingly creeping up. But on the other hand, China remains a communist country that ignores the Western values that have been considered universal since the end of the Cold War. China has enjoyed remarkable economic growth without applying universal values that greatly represent the United States and this is what makes the United States feel important to determine a strategic move (Peerenboom, 2007). China has now succeeded in taking the sympathy of countries in various continents such as Asia, Middle East, Africa and Latin America through its economic capabilities. Various agreements and cooperation have been made by China and it is only a matter of time before China slowly presses the position of the United States as a role model in the international system. John J. Mearsheimer (2014) mentions that the United States will seek to prevent China as a world hegemon. Mearsheimer also added that the pattern of behavior and actions of the United States against China today looks similar to what happened between the United States and the Soviet Union in the Cold War era. To accomplish this, a strategy is needed that can withhold China from their efforts to use military force in order to expand its influence in the international system as well as to balancing through the formation of alliances with countries close to China. This strategy is clearly illustrated in the foreign policy of the United States Pivot to Asia.

5 CONCLUSION

US foreign policy that pivots to Asia can be explained using the international system variables. This explanation aims to find out how the response of a country in dealing with certain issues and changes at the global level. The United States decided to issue this policy on the backdrop of changes occurring in the global order due to some conditions that affect the United States itself. First marked by the 9/11 attacks that shocked the world's public because as the country's strongest hegemon, the United States still has a big gap in its domestic security. This incident based on the cycle in Long Cycles theory by George Modelski signifies the end of the phase of delegitimization and the beginning of the deconcentration phase in the international system. The second event was the economic crisis that hit the United States in 2008 which then spread

to other countries resulting in a severe global recession. This further reduces the prestige of the United States in the eyes of the international. China on the other hand managed to take advantage of these momentum to build the image and dignity in various countries of the world.

Two countries with different ideologies again compete for influence to various countries in the world. With the foundation of rapid economic growth, China successfully established close cooperation with many countries. China also managed to gain sympathy and establish good relations with the Middle East related to cooperation in the field of economy and energy. The United States itself has an unfavorable history with countries in the Middle East ranging from the Yom Kipur War, the Global War on Terror, to the Palestinian-Israeli case. It is only natural that the United States sees this as a threat to its position as a world power and role model at the global level. Therefore, through US foreign policy to go to Asia, the United States hopes to suppress China's increasingly aggressive development.

Based on the descriptions previously described, the authors conclude that the decision of the United States to get closer to Asia can be explained through the variables of the international system. Knowing the exact intentions of a country when deciding a particular foreign policy is difficult to determine. However, by analyzing the available variables, fundamental questions such as why a country applies a particular policy can be answered. Using the theory of Long Cycles by George Modelski, it can be concluded that US foreign policy is a form of response to changes occurring in the international system. Through this policy, the United States hopes to get closer to Asian countries to balance and also reduce the spread of China's strong influence in the region. The United States sees the Asian continent as a strategic area of the economy. In addition, the strong influence of China in the Asian continent also made the United States paranoid to lose the area since the end of the Second World War has been close and dependent on the role model of the United States. Through the theory of Long Cycles proposed by George Modelski, the pattern of US movements in the implementation of Pivot to Asia foreign policy is not only the writer wants to balance the situation at the global level as the official statement from the United States government. There is another interest in stifling China's increasingly aggressive growth and challenging the position of the United States as a world power.

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