

**Title** : United States Rebalancing Policy in the Asia Pacific Region

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## **United States Rebalancing Policy in the Asia Pacific Region**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The Asia Pacific region is a center of security, a global economy, this region is the most strategic region in the world. The Asia Pacific region is also the region with the most dynamic economic growth. This strategic position makes Asia Pacific an important center of activity in global political change. This strategic position can cause conflicts between countries in the region and countries outside the region. The active role of the United States (US) in the Asia-Pacific region before the Cold War has dominated the region. However, after the Cold War, US security policies focused a lot in the Middle East region, and the US seemed to forget the Asia Pacific region. After the emergence of a new emerging superpower state, namely China. The emergence of China with its economic and military power in recent times also directly awakens the meaning of geopolitics and geostrategy in the Asia Pacific. Then the US came up with a rebalancing policy in the Asia Pacific to restore its position in the region and at the same time to rival its rival, China. According to Sir Harold J. Mackinder's theory in his mainland power theory, the US strategy is the right course of action because then this strategy will reverse the US again as a super-power country especially in the Asia-Pacific.

**Keywords:** US, China, Rebalancing Strategy, Asia-Pacific Region

### **INTRODUCTION**

The development of competition between the big countries in the world cannot be separated from the competition to control the ocean area. This condition occurs because the sea area is a 'treasure' in the exploitation of the resources in it, the sea can also be made trade routes and the vast sea area will also affect the security of the land area. The sea area which is currently being the focus of many countries is in the Pacific Ocean, many countries depend on their economic and defense livelihoods in this region. The Asia Pacific is a region that brings together major world powers such as the United States, Japan, Russia, and China. The Asia Pacific is positioned as the key to the interaction of these countries and with other countries in the region.

**Figure 1: Asia Pacific Map**



The Asia Pacific region is the center of security, the global economy, this region is the most strategic region in the world. International security, in general, is largely determined by how the dynamics and security interactions in the region are. The Asia Pacific region is also the region with the most dynamic economic growth. This strategic position makes the Asia Pacific an important center of activity in global political change. This strategic position can cause conflict between countries in the region and countries outside the region. The active role of the United States (US) in the Asia-Pacific region before the Cold War had dominated this region. However, after the Cold War, US security policy focused a lot on the Middle East region, the US seemed to forget the Asia Pacific region and only prioritized oil exploitation in the Middle East region. Thus, a new emerging superpower state emerged, namely China. The emergence of China with its economic and military power in recent times has also directly brought awareness to the meaning of geopolitics and geostrategy in the Asia Pacific.

After the massive domination of China, and after the leadership of President Bush changed to Barack Obama in 2009, the United States (US) began to change its policy focus. The US has officially implemented a rebalancing policy that is focused on the Asia-Pacific Region so that the focus of US foreign policy is no longer on the Middle East Region but the Asian Region. Then at the beginning of the Trump administration, he still focused his policies on the Asia-Pacific region. In 2016, after feeling that US military power and diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region had been maximized, then Trump felt that this rebalancing policy did not involve all aspects and then he implemented his new policy, namely the policy of isolationism. The Asia-Pacific region has become the focus of changes in US foreign policy because it is considered to have experienced significant

developments, especially in the economic and military fields. In addition, the US also has a political interest, namely to maintain its dominance against the domination of China, as a new superpower. The dynamics of strategic environmental developments in the global and regional scope of the Asia Pacific have many positive and negative impacts, these impacts will be felt both for the Asia Pacific region itself and even globally. One of the positive impacts is the emergence of APEC cooperation. Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is a forum for cooperation between 21 economies in the Pacific Ocean ring. APEC consists of 21 members namely Australia, Singapore, Chinese Taipei, Thailand, Hong Kong-China, Indonesia, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, the Philippines, Peru, PNG, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, China Russia, The United States, South Korea, Malaysia, and Viet Nam. APEC's goal is to promote economic growth and improve prosperity in the Asia Pacific. This is done by encouraging and facilitating more free and open trade and investment in the region, as well as increasing cooperation in developing member economic capacity.

In addition to causing a positive impact, the dynamics of the global strategic environment will also have a negative impact on the Asia Pacific region. Territorial disputes and territorial claims are unavoidable in this region, a real example is a conflict in the South China Sea which is still being debated and negotiated apart from that because there is a major dominance in the region, namely from the US-China side, then each country trade war with each other. However, this trade war also has a direct impact on countries in the region, because based on a world bank report, it is stated that Asia Pacific economic growth is expected to slow this year to 5.8 percent. (2019). The decline in economic growth in the Asia-Pacific region will also have an effect on countries in this region. This paper will focus on discussing the US re-presence in Asia-Pacific after the cold war as an effort to rebalance China's power which is considered a threat/enemy in the region.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

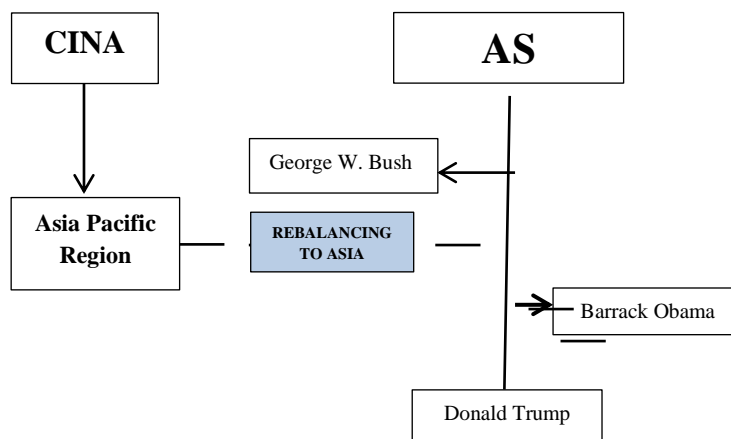
### **Land Force Theory (Sir Harold J.Mackinder )**

Mackinder's theory is a very relevant theory to use, apart from his background as an expert who focuses on the theory of power, he also sparked the concept of continental insight as a concept of developing land power. The theory states that any country that

controls the heartland, namely Europe-Asia, will be able to control the islands of the world and will eventually become the ruler of the world. Mackinder argues that the center of the world is in a zone he calls the pivot area, the region is located in the middle of the world, namely from Russia, Central Asia, China, to the Middle East. Around the pivot, the area is the inner and outer crescents, and the outermost part is called the world-island.

In Mackinder's theory it is explained that the country that controls the pivot area, can control the heartland, then whoever can control the heart of the mainland, then he can control the inner and outer-crescent and finally anyone who can control the inner and outer crescent then he can rule the whole world. The pivot area itself is an area that is very rich in natural resources which is one of the sources of state power. While the inner and outer crescent areas are in the form of large lands that have access to all corners of the world, especially those that have natural resource potentials. In addition, there are also previous studies related to US rebalancing efforts in the Asia-Pacific region, namely research from Anisa L. Umoro with the journal-title "President Trump's Isolationism Policy and the Future of US Military Bases in Japan". This study also discusses the background of the isolationism policy which is the policy of rebalancing to Asia. However, what distinguishes the research by the author is that the author focuses more on the initial initiation of US policies related to the concept of land power/land area which in this journal is more directed towards state domination. but the author also mentions the new policy of isolationism, because this policy is still related to maintaining the security and strength of the US military but is more focused on the state/inward-looking.

**Chart 1: Framework of thinking**



## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This research was conducted with a qualitative approach with case study research on the rivalry between the US and China in the Asia Pacific region. This paper is reviewed from the point of view of the United States with a geopolitical approach. The units of observation in this research are books, journals, articles, and all kinds of literature related to China and US policies related to the Asia-Pacific region. In this study, the author uses a literature search on topics related to the theme. In this study, the author definitely uses secondary data from news, the internet and journals, books, and research on US policy in the Asia Pacific region. this. The stages of data analysis in this study are data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **China's Capability in Asia Pacific**

China's economic growth has increased rapidly in recent years. According to the 2011 Report to Congress of the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, China is the largest industrial country in the world. China's level of industry can surpass the US, especially in manufacturing such as cars, mobile phones, and computers. What's more, large US companies rely on the manufacturing process of product components in China, thereby strengthening China as the world's largest Industrial country. With the largest industry in the world, China's economy continued to grow by 9% in 2011 making China the second-largest economy in the world after the United States.<sup>1</sup>

In China's Peaceful Development policy or as the United States calls it 'China Rise', it is undeniable that China is currently experiencing a significant increase, and is able to influence countries in the Asia-Pacific Region to cooperate in the field. This aims to expand China's economic interests so that the navy is oriented to protect the country's transportation routes and mainline maritime security. To achieve this, the Chinese Navy needs to develop a larger and more comprehensive defense system. Based on the explanation above, it can be said that China is experiencing improvement in the economic and military fields. The most visible thing is that China is able to shift the position of Japan, which used to be ranked second with the largest economic growth in Asia. In terms

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-03/09/c\\_137881355.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-03/09/c_137881355.htm) accessed October 14 at 15:55

of meeting the country's needs, with the economy, China is able to develop its military by increasing the number of personnel and fleets in both land, sea, and air dimensions.

## **China's Geographic As a Threat to the US**

**Figure 2: Map of Russia**



It can be seen based on the geographical location above that China and the United States do not have direct land borders and are separated by the Pacific Ocean. However, the position of China's East Coast which leads directly to the West Coast of the United States presents its own challenges. The geographical conditions of the two countries facing each other increase the opportunities for threats. Supported by military capabilities that are currently increasing, it is possible that China will be able to pose a threat to the US. Not only for himself, but the US also anticipates China to pose a threat to its allied countries in the Asia-Pacific Region. Japan, South Korea, Australia, Thailand, and the Philippines. From the above conditions, China not only poses a challenge to the United States but also its allied countries. Based on the statement by Joe Biden, who is the Vice President of the US, he stated that the US participated in maintaining the security of the alliance countries in the Asia-Pacific region by strengthening relations, especially military and economic relations through cooperation in the countries of the Asia-Pacific region.

## **US Rebalancing Effort**

The term rebalancing also refers to US efforts to correct the alleged neglect of the Asia-Pacific region by the George W. Bush administration. Before President Obama took office, many Southeast Asian leaders in the region felt they had been neglected by the United States. The phrase rebalancing to Asia is meant to rebalance US attention to the

region. This term was also chosen to prevent the assumption that the United States left its attention elsewhere and turned to Asia-Pacific.

Rebalancing to Asia also reflects the need for US global priorities following the withdrawal of its troops from Iraq and Afghanistan which freed up US resources to the Middle East over the last ten years. The withdrawal of troops from the Middle East Region also strengthens indications of a change in strategy in US military policy to the Asia-Pacific Region. The change in focus is carried out by approaching the allied countries, through state visits and collaborative dialogue in various fields, especially security between governments. The Asia-Pacific region has become the focus of changes in US foreign policy because it is considered to have experienced significant developments, especially in the economic and military fields. These developments raise the possibility of political and security impacts, both the possibility of conflict or cooperation between countries in the region, given the many opportunities and challenges in the era of globalization.

### **From Rebalancing to Asia Towards a Policy of Isolationism**

The rebalancing effort by the US was originally a policy in the era of President Barack Obama, whose policy focus was more outward-looking, namely in the Asia-Pacific region. But after the regime change that was Trump's leadership, he wanted to double the military power. President Trump demonstrated this priority by cutting non-military budgets and allocating additional funds to the defense sector. Trump feels that the power and hegemony of the US in the Asia-Pacific region is sufficient, he feels that he now needs to develop and make policies for domestic power. The President's disinterest in continuing to maintain America's hegemony in the eyes of the world is shown by at least two major steps. The first is the policy direction, which is thick with inward-looking nuances. Second, President Trump's reluctance to fill key positions in the US State Department. US policy in the Trump era tends to be inward-looking. Trump's isolationist policy tendencies have been evident since the campaign period, both in the economic and defense fields.

As explained in the previous subchapter, China in recent years has invested heavily in modernizing its military which is strongly suspected by many predictions to trigger an arms race, development of nuclear weapons, modernization of military power (including information technology). Not to mention its nuclear power makes China's



military power bigger than in previous times. Military power as a result of this arms race is in line with China's economic growth which can lead to various geopolitical maneuvers that lead to the Asia Pacific security system that is prone to rivalry. This can be seen in China's increasingly aggressive policies, especially in terms of territorial claims and its aggressive attitude towards countries that have territorial disputes with it. China's tough stance towards several ASEAN countries, such as Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam in the dispute in the South China Sea and towards Japan in the dispute over the Senkaku Islands, has made countries in the region see it as an indication of an increasing Chinese threat.

### **Geopolitical Analysis and Land Power Theory**

The United States is a superpower country where it will continue to expand and strengthen its country through various efforts, one of which is the issuance of the Rebalancing to Asia policy. Rebalancing to Asia is focused on the Asia-Pacific waters region because geographically it can be seen that the Indian Ocean is close to the west coast of the United States coast. In addition, as explained at the beginning of the chapter, the Asia-Pacific region itself is a central region that influences global changes both from an economic, political, and military perspective. Any situation that occurs in the Asia-Pacific region will automatically affect other countries in the region. For example, after the return of US domination in Asia-Pacific with China, an embargo/economic policy emerged, namely a trade war that also directly affected the economies of regional countries, such as Indonesia.

If analyzed with the existing geopolitical theory, namely McKinder's theory of power, which sparked continental insight as a concept of developing land power. The theory states that any country that controls the heartland, namely Europe-Asia, will be able to control the islands of the world and will eventually become the ruler of the world. This is also the same as the strategy/policy that has been carried out by America. Initially, the US began to focus its policies on Asia, the Middle East and now it has begun to focus on the Asia-Pacific region, where the Asia-Pacific region is the heartland/pivot area. Now, the United States is trying to become the dominant power in the world, against its historical rival, China.

## **CONCLUSION**

The US's behavior in carrying out a balancing strategy through a rebalancing policy is a form as well as confirmation of the insecurity regarding the increasing capability that is being experienced by China. Even though China is currently the New Emerging Power, especially in the Asia-Pacific Region, it cannot be said completely that the dominance of world powers has moved into China's hands. In reality, China is still a long way from narrowing its power gap with the US. This requires a long process and requires readiness and independence from all aspects of resources. The US response to the increase or China Rise refers to the balancing strategy effort by forming a US military alliance in order to deal with dynamics in the region. The balancing strategy carried out by the US through strengthening military alliances is an appropriate strategy to narrow China's space to dominate the Asia-Pacific Region.

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