

GLOBAL & STRATEGIS

Th. 9, No. 1, Januari-Juni 2015

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CSGS

ISSN: 1987-9729

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SK Akreditasi: S1/DIRTEK/ep/2011

terbit pertama kali Januari 2007

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media.php?med=23

Global & Strategis adalah jurnal ilmiah yang diterbitkan oleh Cakra Studi Global Strategis (CSGS) sebagai balairung terbuka bagi debat dan diskusi tentang isu-isu global dan strategis. Berkecambah dalam naman CSGS yang berbingkai visi pengembangan “pendekatan global atas persoalan strategis dan pendekatan strategis atas persoalan global”, *Global & Strategis* mengusung semangat dan visi pengembangan serupa. Tidak hanya menjadi ruang tumbuh bagi pendekatan interdisipliner dan holistik terhadap selubung sempit pendekatan persoalan strategis selama ini, *Global & Strategis* juga merupakan ruang hidup bagi tumbuh dan berkembangnya sudut pandang strategis terhadap kompleksitas, kecenderungan absurditas, dan tidak terjangkarkannya pendekatan persoalan global dewasa ini. Diterbitkan dua kali setahun setiap Januari dan Juli, *Global & Strategis* mengundang diskusi, tinjauan, dan analisis kontemporer terhadap spektrum luas persoalan yang membentang dari problematika klasik hubungan luar negeri, pertahanan keamanan, dan permasalahan-permasalahan strategis kebangsaan; problematika dinamika eksternal dan isu-isu strategis ekstrateritorial; problematika regionalisme, sivilisasionalisme, dan isu-isu strategis lintas kawasan; hingga problematika transnasionalisme, universalisme, kosmopolitanisme, nasionalisme, fundamentalisme, dan persoalan-persoalan mondial globalisasi.

US Pivot and Stability in the Asia Pacific Region

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ABSTRACT

The US rebalancing strategy in Asia Pacific confirms the importance of Asia Pacific region particularly for the US and her interest. A rapid economic development in Asia Pacific states coupled with security dynamics that potentially triggers instability in the region have become driving factors for the US involvement in the region. The US (re)-existence as well as her active engagement obviously gives rise to multiple responses and leads to negative perception. This article perceives that the US pivot in Asia Pacific including the strengthening of US influence in the region might provoke tension particularly with China. Nonetheless, a common and mutual interest in economic and security has forced both states to self-restrain and develop strategic partnership, which is essential to achieve their common goals together with other Asia Pacific states. To understand the US strategy and the impact of the strategy, this article analyzes the US official documents as well as other related states' documents, and using the "post-modern states" approach to explain the implication of US military strategy.

Keywords: *US rebalancing strategy, security dynamic, post-modern states, Asia Pacific maritime*

Rebalancing strategy Amerika Serikat (AS) di Asia Pasifik menegaskan pentingnya kawasan ini bagi AS. Pertumbuhan ekonomi yang pesat dan dinamika keamanan yang berpotensi menimbulkan instabilitas di kawasan menjadi salah satu faktor AS untuk aktif melibatkan diri. Kehadiran (kembali) AS disambut beragam dan menimbulkan berbagai persepsi negatif. Menguatnya pengaruh AS di kawasan bisa menimbulkan ketegangan, terutama dengan Cina. Namun, kesamaan kepentingan ekonomi dan keamanan di antara keduanya, membuat baik AS dan Cina akan memilih untuk menahan diri dari konflik dan bekerjasama dengan negara-negara di kawasan tersebut. Artikel ini menganalisis dokumen-dokumen resmi pemerintah AS dan negara-negara terkait, menggunakan pendekatan "post-modern states" untuk menjelaskan pelaksanaan dan dampak strategi militer AS.

Kata Kunci: *Strategi Perimbangan AS, dinamika keamanan, negara post-modern, perairan Asia Pasifik*

Despite the fact that the United States (US) has reduced her involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq, she has been in the initial stages of engagement in Asia Pacific. Her rebalance strategy in Asia Pacific was clearly seen when in November 2011 President Obama performed their intention to play a greater role in the region. In front of the Asia Pacific leaders during East Asia summit in Indonesia, President Obama specifically explained the vital role of Pacific Rim for the US interest. Ultimately, Obama urged the need to secure and protect the US' and her partners' interests in maritime Asia Pacific. For this reason Obama also unveiled the promise to establish a new Marine Corps base in Northern Territory of Australia (NY Times 2011).

Obama did not clearly mention China as triggering factor for their engagement in Asia Pacific. But as mentioned in the 2012 US Defense Strategic Guidance, the US strategic pivot in Asia Pacific related to Beijing's military power and naval ambition (US Department of Defense 2012). Indeed, US pivot in Asia Pacific is in line with the US Global Maritime Strategy published in 2006. This forward in geographic strategy essentially encourages US allies in Asia Pacific, namely the Philippines, Japan, South Korea, and Australia, to collaborate and have joint military exercise with the US Navy. The joint naval exercise positively strengthens the military ties between the US and her allies as well as promotes their capability to deal with both traditional and non-traditional threats in Asia Pacific region. With this partnership, they have opportunity to share information, to enhance the intelligence capacity, and to transfer technology.

In his speech, Obama has also emphasized that the plan to set up the US military base in Darwin is mainly aimed to strengthen the 60th US-Australian security ties. Furthermore, the US-Australian joint operation as well as with her other allies in Asia Pacific is for the maintenance of peace, stability, and free flow of commerce. However, this strategy becomes concerns to certain Asia Pacific states, notably China. This is also a question that is addressed in this paper. Is the US pivot in Asia Pacific an articulation of her efforts to strengthen her security ties with her allies in the region and in turn will enhance the stability in Asia Pacific? Or is it mainly directed to response China's assertiveness in the region? In other words, this paper will examine whether the US current maritime strategy is promoting stability, or on the contrary exacerbating competition with China, which intensifies the existing tension in Asia Pacific.

This paper argues that with the attribute of post-modern state, the US maritime authorities, since the last decade, have adopted maritime strategy that will positively contribute to the stability of the region. The bottom line is that such state provides military strategy, which is

cooperative and forwards geographically. The strategy confirms the US interest to avoid causing friction in the region. This is in addition to ensure free operation and regional access in the Pacific maritime for her and her allies' economic and military interest.

Tension between China and the US is inevitable with the security dynamics and economic growth in Asia Pacific, like in many other countries in the region. The presence of the US may irritate China in the beginning. This is true as in the issue of US-Japan and US-Taiwan relationships. Yet, this article perceives that both US and China will refuse to involve in an open conflict as they have mutual economic ties and common interest in dealing with complex threats at Asia Pacific littoral. Their common economic and security interests will restrain both states from any misconduct and encourage them to be more cooperative to each other. This situation will gradually support stability in the region.

To answer the above mentioned question, this paper is probing the US post-modern naval strategy in the maritime Asia Pacific by analyzing her official documents. This paper is divided into four sections. The first provides a brief description on a contemporary Asia Pacific situation, in terms of its attractiveness and fragilities. Secondly, this paper examines the significance of Asia Pacific maritime to the US interests. The third section is an explanation of potential threats to the interests of the US and her allies in Asia Pacific that force the US to employ her current strategy. This section also explains the US post-modern navy strategy and its implication. Eventually, this paper provides conclusion.

The Vulnerability in Asia Pacific

Lawrence S. Prabhakar (2006) noted in his article that the Asia Pacific region, which includes East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Australia, Pacific Islands as well as Eastern and Northern Pacific Ocean, is a globalized maritime environment with the emphasis not only on states' economic improvement but also on an increasingly significance of transnational maritime threats to its security. The number of economic cooperation in Asia Pacific has increased due to its attractiveness to states' economic development. In addition, the regionalism has also been strengthened since a global free trade is still far from complete (Lloyd 2011). Pacific states' cooperation is articulated and implemented in free trade agreements, both bilaterally and multilaterally such as APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation), TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership), and AFTA (ASEAN Free Trade Area).

Nonetheless, as confirmed by Prabhakar (2006) the economic growth and cooperation in Asia Pacific region is also associated with an

increasing numbers of transnational threats, which mostly happens at sea. Thachuk and Tangredi (2002) defined transnational threats as crime activities perpetrated by non-state actors that not only go beyond national borders but also have global impact. Based on this definition, they subsequently distinguish the transnational crime perpetrators into two types of non-state actors, namely terrorist groups and organized criminal groups.

With regards to terrorist groups, some decades ago their activities were more politically driven and therefore threatened only the security at national level. In the last decade, their activities are more intensely carried out, publicly targeted and globally directed.

They are also using same methods that conducted by organized crime groups to finance their organizations. This is to mention drug trafficking, arms smuggling, money laundering, human trafficking, and piracy. Accordingly, Thachuk and Tangredi (2002) concluded that the line between terrorist motivations and criminal enterprises recently becomes gradually blurred.

In the case of maritime Asia Pacific, terrorist attacks have become an issue. Some militant Islamic groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah in Indonesia, Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines, and Kumpulan Militan Malaysia (KMM) were perceived to have connection with Al Qaeda who has exploded US Arleigh-Burke class Destroyer, USS Cole, in 2000. (Campbell & Gunaratna 2003; Chua Pui Hong 2006). Subsequently, some terrorist observers perceived that the AQ linked groups in Southeast Asia groups have an intention to attack the Strait of Malacca. (Sittnick 2005) Once this attack happens, it obviously creates a huge economic damage. This damage in turn impacts not only the local government but also other states that rely on Malacca Straits, particularly the US, which is the main target of Al Qaeda.

In relation to piracy threats, as reported by International Chamber of Commerce - International Maritime Bureau (ICC-IMB), there were 544 pirate attacks in the Strait of Malacca, Singapore, Indonesian, and Malaysian coastal waters from 2003 to 2007 (ICC-IMB Report 2007). It was nearly 36% of all piracy attacks in all seas in the world. However, the ICC-IMB (2011) reported that the number of piracy crimes in the Strait of Malacca Singapore, Indonesian, and Malaysian coastal waters has dropped to 288 attacks in 2007 - 2011. This happens due to the increase and aggressive patrols by the littoral states authorities since July 2005. Although the pirate attacks can be reduced, it remains concerned by some states in Asia Pacific region as there were at least 50 incidents of piracy happened in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore Straits, and the Strait of Malacca in the first semester of 2011 (IMB Report 2011).

Interestingly, as mentioned by Chinese government in her White Defense Paper (2010), the Asia Pacific security situation has become more complex. The threats not only come from non-traditional actors, but also from states. Some of these traditional problems are related to sea territorial boundaries such as that happen in South China Sea as well as East Sea with their overlapping claims. This is not to mention the unresolved problem of Chinese-Taiwan relationships with regards to 'One China' policy, and in turn provokes tension between China and the US.

There is also tension caused by arms dynamics. Due to transnational threats and willingness to protect and secure their territorial boundaries, Pacific states subsequently modernize their armaments. As a consequence, military competition appears. This happens, for example, between China and Japan lately (Cole 2010; Damayanti 2013). Military competition may also trigger military alliances between major and middle powers, such as joint military exercises conducted by Australian, India, Japan, and the US. This alliance subsequently intensifies the tension between the US with her allies on one side and China on the other side.

Furthermore, the program of nuclear proliferation in North Korea that has been developed since the late 1950s remains problematic in this region. The last but not the least is the rejection from coastal states, namely Indonesia and Malaysia, to other states' initiatives for securing the Strait of Malacca (The Jakarta Post 28 Aug 2007). The lack of Indonesian's capacities to eradicate pirates in this strait leads others, notably the US, China, and Japan, to offer assistances to Indonesia. However, as noted in The Jakarta Post (28 Aug 2007), Indonesian government rejected their proposals due to sovereignty issues. Indonesia's decision inevitably creates concerns to others, as they need to protect their oil and gas supply, as well as commercial and military interests that pass through Strait of Malacca.

The complex situation and security dynamic happening in Asia Pacific to a greater extent has become a concern to the states in the region. The potential threats both traditional and non-traditional towards its littoral, in addition to the important functions of the sea in Pacific Oceans, which will be discussed below, according to Admiral Chew Men Leong (2009), the former Chief Navy of Republic Singapore Navy, has called for certain maritime strategy from Asia Pacific states, including the US authorities. This maritime strategy is obviously vital to protect their interests in such waters, in term of security and economic.

The Significance of Pacific Maritime

Both traditional and non-traditional threats inevitably urge Asia Pacific states to employ certain defense strategies. Since the globalization brings not only economic benefits but also complex threats happening mostly at sea, many Asia Pacific littoral states accordingly decide to build up their naval power. As noted by Tangredi (2002), globalization changes the maritime security environment and therefore impacts to the military forces that operate in and from the maritime environment. Indeed, the navies holds vital role in maintaining the security of globalization (Coulter 1998). Therefore they have to adopt such strategic policy and develop their capabilities in line with the changes.

As far as Asia Pacific maritime is concerned, there are at least three factors that affect Asia Pacific states to transform their strategic defense policy and naval development. *First*, Asia Pacific Ocean, which also includes South China Sea, is rich for its natural resources. Based on the US Geological Survey (USGS) estimation in 1997, South China Sea region has proven oil reserves at about 7.5 billion barrels. This supply provides China government with oil production of over 1.3 million barrels per day (Global Security 1997). This is not to mention the abundance fish and other marine outcomes that are resulted from the sea, which certainly benefits states in Pacific Rim. In 2010, for example, China's total aquatic production reached more than 60 million tons from its EEZ (Economic Exclusive Zone), an increase of 47,5 million tons in 2004 and 7.5 million tons from 1999 (FAO Fisheries Statistics 2011).

For these reasons, China claims the biggest part of South China Sea as part of their territorial. China claims the "nine-dotted line" or the "U-shaped line" which also covers the Pratas Islands, the Paracel Islands, the Macclesfield Bank, and the Spratly Islands (Ming and Dexia 2003). In line with this claim, Chinese government through her White Defense Paper (2010) confirmed her increased of military expenditure and arms modernization, particularly their naval power, are directed to protect their national sovereignty and interests covering also South China Sea area. Obviously, the protection also applies to all resources therein.

Another claimant state, Vietnam, has also performed a significant increase in her defense budget; from USD 987.70 million in 2006 to USD 1,36 billion in 2007, and dramatically increased to become USD 2,6 billion in 2011 and USD 3,3 billion in 2012 (SIPRI 1988 - 2012). The Vietnamese government justified her military budget increasing for two reasons: to protect her sovereignty and to support her military modernization (Vietnam Defense Paper 2009). Like Vietnam, the Philippines have also established a reformation in her defense strategy since 2003. Initially, along with the US, the defense reform is directed to

respond to the 9/11 terrorist's attack. Yet, the program is then specifically containing the mission to protect the Philippines national territory and its Exclusive Economic Zone from external aggression and transnational threats (The Philippines Department of National Defense 2007).

Secondly, Asia Pacific littoral states need to modernize their navies due to the important role of Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOC) in Asia Pacific Ocean. Sea routes are important for transportation and trading system (Till 2009). More than 60,000 vessels pass through the Strait of Malacca to Pacific waters carrying various cargoes every year (Zubir 2011). It is doubled numbers than vessels that cross the Suez Canal and about three times than that use the Panama Canal. This makes the strait becomes one of the busiest waters in the world. Moreover, according to the US Department of Homeland Security, approximately 30% of the world's trade and 50% of its oil products pass through the Strait of Malacca. The report also said that nearly 15 million barrels oil per day flow from the Persian Gulf, through the Strait of Malacca toward Japan, South Korea, China, as well as the US (Global Equity Research 2008). The Strait of Malacca holds important role since it is the main entrance and the shortest sea route from Persian Gulf to East Asia. To assure the free flow of goods and to protect the oil and petroleum supply, Pacific states justify the significant development of their naval power.

Thirdly, the increased of economic prosperity in Asia Pacific States has enabled them to modernize their military power, particularly their naval power. As a set of processes involving the growing multi-directional flows of people, objects, and information, globalization is broad perceived to bring about economic growth to states (Ritzer 2011; Lloyd 2011). In turn, states' welfare positively affects on states' military forces. The successful American economy, for example, is the basis for American political and military strength, as well as her sea power (Dombrowski 2006).

China is another example. As her economic has grown over the last decade she also increased her defense expenditure 11.7 – 20.3 per cent annually (China White Defense Paper 1998-2010; Bitzinger 2007). Despite the fact that Chinese government less openly published their naval spending they allow PLA Navy to build its naval and missile forces. Their maritime strategy justifies the procurement of nuclear-powered submarines, frigates, amphibious landing craft warships, fighter-bombers, aircraft missiles, aircraft carrier, and destroyers. These destroyers are also completed with supersonics and anti-ship cruise missiles.

The above description confirms that Asia Pacific maritime is the prime medium and symbol of globalization recently. For these reasons, in front

of the Asia Pacific leaders during East Asia summit in November 2011, President Obama highlighted the importance of Pacific region for the US. He specifically explained the vital role of Pacific Rim for US economic development. Indeed, the US government has concerned not only to the sea-trade system itself but also the safe conditions for the trade. Therefore, as confirmed by President Obama, the US need to secure and protect their vital interests in this maritime (NY Times 2011). This is in the sense of protecting their commercial as well as securing Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC) for their economic and military access in Pacific littoral.

To reflect Obama's intention, the 2012 US Strategic Defense Guideline justifies the US military to continue their leadership in promoting security globally, in particular the Asia Pacific region. To sustain her global leadership, US government strongly supports her military to build stronger partnership with capable allies. They reassure that the presence of US military personnel and capability in the region will maintain peace, stability, and the access to and the use of global commons not only for the US but also for Asia Pacific states (US Department of Defense 2012). Pacific maritime merely refers to Asia, while the coverage of Pacific states/region is not comprehensively elaborated. To some extent, it causes from the absence of the definition of Pacific in this article.

US Rebalance Strategy in Asia Pacific

As described by Till (2009) in his book *Seapower*, post-modern states are confident that globalization is associated with both economic benefits and vulnerabilities. In this situation, a comprehensive and carefully integrated action is needed to shape a safe and stable international environment. Consequently, they adopt defense policies that focus on the maintenance of international stability rather than national security. In order to maintain international peace and security, post-modern states choose to cooperate with other states instead of fighting the enemies of the globalization individually. Such post-modern states believe no country can resolve the international problems alone.

As noted earlier, Asia Pacific region is not only endowed with natural richness and economic benefits. The states also have to face problems that arise from non-state actors such as terrorism and piracy, as well as from state actors. In addition to North Korea's nuclear ambition, China's unilateral claim on South and East China Sea coupled with her transformation of sea power has created problem and provoked tension with her neighbors. In the case of China's claim, for instance, the US concerns with the freedom of navigation in Asia Pacific Ocean, while

Japan and some South East Asian Countries concern with the East and South China Sea overlapping claims. In US perspective, by employing such strategy China not only threatens its neighborhood states but also creates instability in the region (US Department of Defense 2012). Although Chinese government has declared the implementation of its peaceful development approach, her naval power projection may perform her assertiveness to others. This in turn creates security dilemma such as for Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines, and eventually instability to the region.

As in the case of Japan, Japanese government perceives China military capability is not only used to force Taiwan with regards to its independence. Her navy power is also likely to force Japan forth out from Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands (Japan Defense White Paper 2010). With regard to this overlapping claim, Japan perceives China's arms build-up, particularly in navy capabilities, as a threat. Although Japan and China have conducted a peaceful mechanism to settle the claim and on natural resources deposits in this water it has yet come to end. The escalation activities of Chinese naval near the gas and oil field in the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands have led to Japan's concern. In response to China policy, Japan has revised her defense strategy and arranged a New Defense Program Outlines (NDPO). For the first time, after her security agreement with US in 1951, Japan was approved her own power projection capabilities that made her procured UH-60JA multi role helicopters, Hawk surface-to-air missiles, landing ship tank for helicopters and destroyer-helicopter ships (World Security Network 2004).

China's unilateral claim on sea territories and her activities to protect what she has claimed coupled with Sino-Japan arms dynamics, significantly provokes instability in Asia Pacific. Instability of the region subsequently encourages the US to conduct such rebalancing strategy in Asia Pacific. To justify the US focus shifted in Asia Pacific region, the former US Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates (2008) mentioned three reasons. First, the US perceives herself as part of Asia Pacific states which has certain role in the region. Second, the US seeks for openness and a common use of common spaces for its mutual interests, particularly at sea. And finally, the US sustains her interest in this region and plays her significant role, as it has been performed for the last 60 years, to keep the region stable. As part of Asia Pacific nations, the US intentionally addresses Asia Pacific region within her defense priorities. These priorities clearly demonstrate that maintaining a safe and secure sea lane as well as upholding the principle of freedom of navigation in Pacific waters have become the core of US interest (Bradford 2011). The US Navy justifies this as a freedom of navigation that has been practiced by all states for centuries. Although the US has yet ratified the 1982

United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), they may gain benefit from the rights of the convention since it is derived from customary international law (Groves 2011).

Indeed, the idea of US pivot strategy in Asia Pacific has been developed for more than a decade. In 2001, US Department of Defense has announced the US defense strategy that demands their armed forces to provide flexible capabilities for wider purposes and contingencies. This capability is important as they intended to expand their overseas presence from Middle East to Pacific littoral (US Department of Defense 2001; Mitchell 2001; Kugler 2002). This statement obviously confirms the US willingness to stretch out their strategic plan to Pacific region, including Asia Pacific region and its littoral. The US military power needs sufficient capabilities since Asia Pacific region is not free from disturbances. These capabilities should be flexible to deal with both traditional as well as non-traditional threats, including the humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

The 2001 US Defense Strategy is then supported by the 2007 US Maritime Strategy, which also confirms the focus of US naval to Pacific oceans. The 2007 Maritime Strategy essentially allows the US sea services, namely US Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard, to cooperate and station a credible combat power in the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean. This strategy allows the US sea power to particularly aim, firstly to protect their vital interests, in terms of economy and military; secondly to promote greater collective security, stability, and trust; thirdly to defend their national security; and finally to defeat adversaries in war. To achieve a greater collective security and to maintain the stability in the region, Admiral Michael Mullen has been proposing a series of Global Maritime Partnerships that marked by a “Thousand-Ship Navy” since 2006. Indeed, this global maritime partnership significantly performs the US post-modern navies in handling international problems collaboratively as well as a continuation and extension of the US 2001 defense strategy (Mullen 2006). With this strategy, the US partnership calls for maritime forces of friendly nations to work together against threats in the sea and from ashore that may comes both from states and non-state actors.

The US Department of State clearly explains that her global maritime partnership strategy is mainly aimed to build mutual and stronger relationships between the US navies and other state’s navies. More importantly, this partnership is to support the US forward presence in maritime around the world in order to maintain international peace and stability. Admiral Samuel Locklear, the current commander of the US Pacific Command, supports this strategy as he perceived that “The security in the region is about all of us, not just about the US Navy or the

US military presence in one place or the other.” (US Department of State 2013).

With such interconnected military and naval policies, the US maritime authorities then encourages her allies in Asia Pacific - the Philippines, Japan, South Korea and Australia - to collaborate and have joint military exercises, one of which is RIMPAC (Rim Pacific), held by the US Commander Pacific Fleet in every two years around Hawaiian Islands. The biannual RIMPAC naval exercise in 2008 reported the well conduct of this strategy. The exercise involved 10 navies, 35 warships, 6 submarines, 150 aircrafts and 20.000 marines, sailors, airmen and coast guard (Star Bulletin 2008). The number of RIMPAC participants increased in 2014, as 22 nations, 49 surface ships, 6 submarines, more than 200 aircrafts, more than 100 units and 25.000 service personnel joined the naval exercise (RIMPAC Report 2014). This joint military exercise significantly strengthens the military ties between the US and her allies as well as promotes their capability in dealing with any threats, both traditionally and non-traditionally that come from sea and from ashore. In such naval and military exercise, the participants also have opportunity to share information, to enhance the intelligence capacity and to transfer technology that enables them all to build such proficiency. Moreover, according to the Commander of US Pacific Fleet, Admiral Harry Harris, the RIMPAC participants believe that the joint naval exercise is likely to build maritime stability and security, which are essential for prosperity to flourish at home and around the world (RIMPAC Report 2014).

As the US’ allies, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Australia positively respond to the US maritime partnership. They actively join the biannual military exercise in Pacific Rim that has been held since 1970s and obviously enjoy the benefits from their involvement. Some Southeast Asian navies such as Indonesian KRI Banda Aceh and Land Forces, Malaysia Infantry Platoon, Singapore RSS Intrepid (F 69) and S-70B Seahawk, as well as KDB Darulaman (OPV 08) and KDB Darussalam (OPV 06) have also joined the exercise. These are in addition to some other participants from China, France, Netherlands, Norway, Canada, Peru, and New Zealand. The significant numbers of participants from Asia Pacific states signalizes the success of US post-modern navies and her maritime partnership in maintaining the security, stability and prosperity in the region.

Despite her success of maritime partnership in Asia Pacific, some observers may differently view the US pivot in the region. They perceive that the US maritime strategy is not only a support to build stronger relationship with her allies, but also as a reaction to counter China’s defense strategy and her assertiveness on East and South China Sea

disputes (Scalapino 2004; Chao and Chang 2008). In this case, the US support should also be understood in the perspective of security ties between the US and her allies, which mostly have traditional problems with China. Besides, a closer engagement of US in the region might also provoke US-Sino relationship, which remains vulnerable in the last decade due to some issues such as US support to Japan and Taiwan, US perception on China's transparency and China's human rights problems (Scalapino 2004; Chao and Chang 2008).

Yet, this article believes that the tension between US and China has never become an open and real conflict over the last two decades. Not only China eventually joined the RIMPAC naval exercise for the first time in 2014 (RIMPACT Report 2014), the US' and China's mutual interest in economic development has also encouraged them to wisely conduct their respective national policy as well as their maritime strategy. More importantly, their economic interest has significantly brought them to a closer relationship with consultative dialogues, both bilaterally and regionally. In line with this, Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping has delivered a speech during the opening of the US-China Economic and Trade Cooperation Forum in Los Angeles, in 2012. He confirmed that both China and US have benefited from their growing business ties over the past four decades and have experienced a win-win situation (English CRI 2012).

According to US Congress Research Service on US-China trade issues, the economic ties between the two states have greatly expanded from \$2 billion in 1979 to an estimated \$559 billion in 2013 (US Congressional Research Service, 2014). China is currently the US' second-largest trading partner after Canada, her third-largest export market after Canada and Mexico, and her biggest source of imports. Although there is a tension due to US trade deficit with China, yet a study by the US International Trade Commission (USITC) estimated that in 2002 over 99% of computer exports in China were from foreign-invested firms in China, mainly from Pacific states including the US (USITC Report, 2008). This estimation supported the US Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) report regarding the US Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in China. The report confirmed the US' FDI in China was \$51.4 billion in 2012, down from \$59.0 billion in 2010. Further, BEA estimated that US majority-owned affiliates in China employed 1.4 million workers in China in 2011, of which 690,000 were in manufacturing (BEA Report 2011).

In short, this article performs that US pivot in Asia Pacific strategy is an essential way to strengthen military partnership with her allies in the region. Indeed, US rebalance strategy comes from her concern to maintain stability and to promote security in Asia Pacific region

collectively. Like other naval powers, US navies have responsibilities to protect her economic and military interests particularly from the vulnerabilities of Asia Pacific maritime. Yet, her willingness to play a greater role in maintaining the international security and stability has forced US naval power not only to protect her national interests, but also her allies', partners' and friendly states' interests. For this initiative, the US encourages states in the region, as many as possible, to collaborate in joint military exercises.

In the case of US-China relationship, their economic interdependence will essentially keep both states to self-restrain from any potential destructive military activities. Moreover, an increased in non-traditional threats in Asia Pacific littoral, such as transnational crimes and natural disasters, force all states in Asia-Pacific, including US and China to participate in dealing with such complex threats. The common concerns on the enemy of the globalization system and mutual interests in prosperity and security will bring both of them to cooperatively manage the problem, as well as with other states in the region. Furthermore, the strategic maritime partnership of Asia Pacific states will gradually reduce the existing tension particularly between the US and China, and promote stability in the region.

Conclusion

The importance of maritime Asia Pacific coupled with its vulnerabilities ultimately calls upon Asia Pacific States, including US, to deploy certain naval policy. As a post-modern navy, the US adopts defense strategy to collectively maintain stability in global and Asia Pacific maritime as well as to protect her and her allies' interest in terms of economy and military. The US maritime strategy in Asia Pacific might provoke tension between the US and China initially. Yet, despite their negative perception on each other, the tension itself has never become an open and real conflict. Indeed, a common interest in bilateral and regional economic cooperation as well as global participation in dealing with complex threats and security dynamic in the region will gradually reduce tension. These mutual concerns in turn promote the stability in Pacific region. For sure, a series of confidence building measures through dialogue and partnership remain important to build mutual trust between the US-China and other Asia Pacific states.

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