

**OBAMA ADMINISTRATION'S REBALANCING POLICY
TOWARD THE ASIA-PACIFIC: STRATEGIES AND
CHALLENGES**

*Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
for award of the degree of*

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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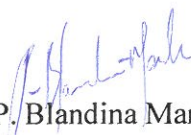
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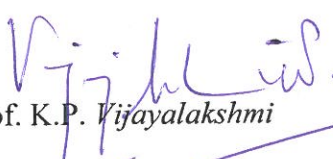
DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled "OBAMA ADMINISTRATION's REBALANCING POLICY TOWARD THE ASIA-PACIFIC: STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES" submitted by me, for award of the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY, is my own work and has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.


P. Blandina Mark

CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


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P. Blandina Mark

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Abbreviations

A2/AD – anti-access/area-denial

ADIZ – Air Defense Identification Zone

ANZUS – Australia, New Zealand, and U.S.

APEC – Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation

ASAT – Anti-Satellite Weapon

ASB – Air Sea Battle

ASEAN – Association of Southeast Asian Nations

ASEAN+3 – Association of Southeast Asian Nations including China, Japan and Korea

ARF – ASEAN Regional Forum

AUSMIN – Australia-United States Ministerial

BMD – ballistic missile defence

C4ISR – Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance

CFC – Combined Forces Command

CPC – Communist Party of China

CRS – Congressional Research Service

CTBT – Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty

DoD – Department of Defense

DoS – Department of State

DPRK – Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea)

EAS – East Asia Summit

EDA – Effective Development Assistance

ESF – Economic Support Fund

Etc – et cetera

FMF – Foreign Military Financing

FTA – Free Trade Agreement

FY – Fiscal Year

G2 – Group of Two

G7 – Group of Seven

G-20 – Group of 20

HADR – Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief

IAEA – International Atomic Energy Agency

IMET – International Military Education and Training

ICBM – Intercontinental Ballistic Missile

Indo-US – India and United States

IOR-ARC – Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation

JCS – Joint Chiefs of Staff

Jr. – Junior

JSDF – Japan Self-Defense Forces

KORUS – US-Korea free Trade Agreement

Lt. – Lieutenant

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NDPG – National Defense Program Guidelines

OPCON – Operational Command

P-5 – The five Permanent members of the United Nations Security Council

PLAN – People's Liberation Army Navy

POSOW – Paramilitary Operations Short of War

PRC – People's Republic of China

Ret. – Retired

ROK – Republic of Korea (South Korea)

SAIS – School of Advanced International Studies

Sino-ROK – China and Republic of Korea

START – Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty

TAC – Treaty of Amity and Cooperation

TPP – Trans-Pacific Partnership

TPSEP – Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership

UNSC – United Nations Security Council

US-ROK – US and Republic of Korea

U.S. / US – United States

Vis-à-vis – with regard to

WMD – Weapon of Mass Destruction

WWII – Second World War

YSEALI – Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative

Illustrations

Maps

1 Asia-Pacific

4.1 South China Sea



RUSSIA

KAZAKHSTAN

MONGOLIA

CHINA

JAPAN

North Pacific Ocean

Philippine Sea

INDIA

NEPAL

BANGLADESH

BURMA

LAOS

THAILAND

CAMBODIA

VIETNAM

PHILIPPINES

INDONESIA

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

AUSTRALIA

Indian Ocean

FEDERATED STATES OF INDONESIA

EAST TIMOR

Chapter 1

Introduction

The ‘rebalance’ policy as announced by November 2011 became the subject of serious debate and discussion around the world and in Asia-Pacific particularly. It originated from Washington’s strategic decision of turning around and directing its attention to Asia-Pacific under President Barack Obama. Renewal of engagement in the region by the United States through its foreign policy strategy is painted in the background when the idea of “rebalance” is discussed. The policy towards the region under the Obama Administration brought about dynamic changes in Asia’s security, military, political-diplomatic and economic framework, in general. By the middle of the first term of the Obama Administration, the new strategic effort took off with good momentum. The policy was announced by Secretary Clinton as “pivot” but was later changed to “rebalance”. Obama’s second term made further efforts to balance the “rebalance” strategy amidst uncertainties as it was perceived to be a better reflection of the situation, across the immensely diverse and swiftly changing Asia-Pacific region and political environment inside the US.

America’s increasing involvement and interest in the Asia-Pacific region and its impact in regional and global order has been the subject of intense debate and discussion among scholars and experts of the field. Dynamism had been rapidly mounting in the region while America was draining itself in long drawn conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. The problem was further exacerbated by the rise of China. Obama Administration’s consideration included China’s remarkable development and the guarantee it held out to its huge and rapidly expanding consumer market. Asia was becoming the global economy’s centre of gravity (Obama 2009, 14 November).

In Asia-Pacific, American policy makers also realized the need for stability to maintain and accelerate prosperity. The focus, in fact, began to shift from Europe to the Asia-Pacific region (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2010, 21 January, S. HRG. 111-708).

As President Barack Obama toured the region to implement his Administration's Asia-Pacific policy, the one fundamental question being asked was to what extent Washington was able to execute the rebalance policy and play its leadership role, with its grand military strategy, economic engagement and enormous diplomatic clout in maintaining security in the region (Office of the Historian, Department of State 2018).

The study would also examine, amongst other important questions, how Washington and the rising powers of the Asia-Pacific region observed the rebalance policy and how it affected them. To be able to understand the complexities of the political, military and economic dynamics in the region, it has considered various perspectives to understand American foreign policy towards the region by applying dominant American foreign policy views which would explain developments in the region, specifically concentrating on Obama Administration's rebalance policy. Several official documents, speeches, declarations and arguments have also been mentioned below. Some of the perspectives presented later in the chapter about the international and regional systems without a doubt influenced the Washington's view of the region in forming its "rebalance" policy. It is also important to trace the political impact of rising China in the region along with resultant change in power dynamics that led to the formulation of rebalance policy.

The world became unipolar in which the U.S. was the most powerful country, in the post-Cold War period. Accordingly, the U.S. unipolar system had important characteristics such as, firstly, a system in which the U.S. did not have any formidable rival and its different dimensions of power had a global reach, secondly, the spread of American democratic principles, preservation of human rights, free trade, freedom of navigation, security and prosperity, thirdly, the international and multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) – all these were being led by the U.S., fourthly, the alliances and relationships the U.S. has created with countries throughout the globe particularly in Asia-Pacific, and fifthly, the American military power was in a class of its own. The total U.S. military spending amounted to 45 percent of the total military spending of the world, the American military was also equipped with the latest and highly sophisticated military

technologies. It had bases abroad in more than 100 countries with global reach (Baylis et al. 2014).

Nonetheless, rapid growth of emerging economies in Asia in the 21st century including countries such as China, South Korea, Japan, India and Indonesia, and expansion of their influence in the global and regional arenas posed the question if the U.S. unipolarity has started to erode and threatened. The phenomenal growth in Asia along with the fast pace of globalization, created uncertainties and triggered on the possibility of return to bipolarity or rise of multipolarity or other type international/regional order could emerge. In Asia-Pacific, America's allies needed it to protect and support them, while other Asian developing nations saw the U.S. as a revisionist power in the region while they being part of the status quo. This was reflected in the way regional organizations such as BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India and China), ASEAN, ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and One Belt One Road" (OBOR) initiative have been pushing for greater regional and global influence. Along with their growing power and economies, these emerging powers felt the need to have a greater say and seat at the highest negotiating tables (Wickett et al. 2015).

In the light of shifting balance of power in Asia, where China and other powers – India, Japan, South Korea and Russia – were observed as emerging at a tremendous speed and wearing down the American hegemonic status, the question became as to how under Obama the U.S. as a Pacific power was going to tackle both the power relations among the nations and complexity of the region as a whole (Obama 2011, 17 November).

As the policy emerged from the Obama administration, seven texts illuminated the content and nature of the new strategic approach toward the Asia-Pacific region. These texts also helped to understand Washington's objectives, interests and response toward a rising Asia and provided a vantage point. These seven comprised of the article "America's Pacific Century" published by then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Foreign Policy magazine in October 2011 (Clinton 2011, 11 October); on 10 November 2011, the speech delivered by then Secretary Clinton at the East West Centre in Honolulu (Clinton 2011, 10 November); the remarks given by Barack Obama at the APEC CEO Summit on Asia-Pacific in Honolulu on 12 November 2011 (Obama 2011, 12

November); on 17 November 2011, the famous speech delivered by Obama in the Australian Parliament (Obama 2011, 17 November); on 19 November 2011, statement made by President Obama at the Bali East Asia Summit (The White House 2011, 19 November); and in January 2012, the Department of Defense (DOD) published the paper “Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense”, also known as the Defense Strategic Guidance or DSG (Department of Defense 2012); and statement presented by then National Security Advisor Tom Donilon at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies on rebalancing on 15 November 2012 (The White House 2012, 15 November). All these texts are further examined in detail in the following chapter.

As precursor to the seven texts mentioned above, few other significant statements were made by the Obama Administration. In 2010, at the 17th ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Meeting held in Vietnam, Hillary Clinton asserted that the administration would certainly take on responsibilities to help build East Asia Summit (EAS) into a stronger regional security and political institution; assist in dealing with imminent challenges posed by North Korea and Burma; discuss and make breakthroughs on climate change, trading and economic integration, democracy and human rights; open access to Asia’s maritime commons and navigation while upholding international law in the South China Sea (Clinton 2010, 23 July).

At a hearing in 2010 before the Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and the Global Environment, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, then Assistant Secretary, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Kurt M. Campbell testified saying, “There should be no doubt that the United States, itself, is a Pacific nation.” Calling this century the Asia-Pacific century, he talked about the importance of accommodating the new powers such as China and India peacefully, keeping in mind the opportunities and challenges presented, and improving the existing international system alongside the already established powers like the U.S. and Japan (U.S. Congressional Hearing 2010, 3 March, Serial No. 111–115). The speech gave a clue to the underlying rationale of US approach. It emphasized that US would remain engaged in Asia and Pacific and it would try to bring in rising Asian powers within the existing (US created) international system.

Thus, the current research has examined the various approaches, diplomatic-political, economic and military aspects of Obama Administration's grand geostrategic "rebalance policy" to the Asia-Pacific region. It has also delved into the subject matter of how the Obama Administration sought to balance the "rebalance policy" which involved various elements, especially the Administration's attempt to balance the imbalance in military, diplomatic and economic equations. Diplomatic issues seemed to be given equal importance in furthering the vitality of the new foreign strategic initiative. However, the question was how much effort the Obama Administration would put in implementing the rebalance strategy in the region while realizing the significance of the initiative in the region. Another question was whether the Administration had a clear and comprehensive strategy to engage in the region and execute the rebalance policy?

Literature Review

Several theorists, American foreign policy experts and scholars have analyzed the complexities and dynamics of America's power and status in the world and the Asia-Pacific. This was triggered by the heightened strategic focus of the Obama administration in redefining the terms of US engagement and involvement in the region. While some discussed the nature and ties between America and its allies such as Japan, South Korea, Australia and the Philippines; bilateral ties with states such as Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Cambodia, Laos, Burma, Taiwan and India; competitors and foes in Asia including China, North Korea and Russia; Washington's engagement in the regional institutions – ASEAN, APEC, ARF, EAS and G20; and alliance system like ANZUS in East Asia and the Pacific region. Others have dealt with the key aspects of change in power relations in international politics especially, the relative power of the U.S. vis-à-vis the other powers and structures in Asia. In doing so, diverse viewpoints, theories and even new explanations have been advanced. The endeavor of this literature review is to identify the key dimensions of the rebalancing strategic policy of the Obama Administration namely the political, economic and military-security aspects and the dynamics of the policy's evolution and execution process. As noted US foreign policy expert Fareed Zakaria, in *The Post-American World: And the Rise of the Rest* has opined

the U.S. relative power is not declining significantly but that there has been rise of other powers, especially both China and India (Zakaria 2009).

Some theories focus on unipolarity theory, realist theories and liberal theories to explain America's sudden surge of escalating interest in Asia-Pacific. Theorists of unipolarity emphasized how America's pivot to Asia was a significant policy development as it not only showed the U.S. as the single most powerful country emerging from the cold war but also how scholars such as John Ikenberry and others suggested that the international political system witnessed unipolarity after the cold war period which created consequences at systemic levels and affected foreign policy decision-making of countries, for however long a period it stays. They also pointed out three effects of unipolarity to study, even if definite conclusions could not be made yet, as the unipolar state had not ended yet and the depth of this state could not be confirmed so far. The effects were: firstly, the actions of the unipole, secondly, the conduct of other states, and thirdly, the characteristics of the global structure. Ikenberry also asked if the "shift from cold war bipolarity to unipolarity" altered "hegemonic leadership incentives" (Ikenberry et al., 2009).

Ikenberry's study published after the financial crisis argued that the U.S.-dominated western system presents rules and institutions that benefit all states including weak and strong, rising and falling, emerging and mature. Further, the system also generates economic growth and prosperity while exerting restraint. According to this view, it is of utmost importance for the United States to put in effort to integrate rising powers into important international institutions. The U.S. must put in place institutions and strengthen statutes that would safeguard its interests regardless of any power transition or global power distribution in the coming ten, fifty, or even hundred years. As the United States' global and unipolar position get challenged by China and other rising powers, power transition may lead to the decline of the U.S., however, the western order that the United States leads can remain as the overriding order of the twenty-first century (Ikenberry 2008). Overall, the Obama administration needed a fresh policy start to its involvement in the Asia-Pacific.

Much of the literature has been influenced by reports such as National Intelligence Council's 2020 and so forth. On the idea of unipolarity, the report of the National Intelligence Council's 2020 project, on the prospects of regions in the first decade of the 21st century, calculated that America would continue to lead. The National Intelligence Council was created in 1979 as a center for strategic thinking within the United States Intelligence Community. The report also argued that most of the important powers had given up the idea of balancing the U.S. It went on to explain the tectonic shift in global politics after the Cold War and the ramifications of the changes including the emergence of rising powers in Asia. At the same time, countries such as Japan and South Korea in the Asia-Pacific region have always been seen as Washington's reliable friends, and the relationships between the U.S. and its allies in this region would be deeply affected and influenced by China's rise and the way in which opportunities and challenges have been unfolding in the region due to this (National Intelligence Council 2004).

Later, *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World* report was published in 2008 by the National Intelligence Council. This report depicted a world in which the United States continued to have a key position in global politics as a world power, however its status and power were reduced to one amongst many other global actors that controlled concerns and challenges. This clearly reflected the change in America's view of world politics as compared to the 2020 project report. The biggest difference between the 2020 Project of 2004 and 2025 Project of 2008 was the latter's prediction of a multipolar world in the future, wherein the world would experience remarkable changes in the global system. The 2025 report went on to assert that the possibilities of significant discontinuities in political trends were even more probable. It stressed that "no single outcome seems preordained" and asserted that in the following twenty years, a shift towards a new global order would be loaded with threats such as potential interstate clashes over resources. Both the 2020 and 2025 reports predicted rapid international economic growth led by the rising powers including China, India and Russia (National Intelligence Council 2008).

Later, reports projected the role of the US in the Asia-Pacific region differently. *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds Report* published in 2012, argued that the U.S.

hegemony would disappear and that power would be transferred to networks and coalition in a multipolar setting. Even the states such as the U.S. with substantial assets such as strong GDP, huge population, amongst others would need to become part of the globalized networks and coalitions in an international system where unipolar and bipolar orders would have been replaced by a multipolar system. Furthermore, the report anticipated the big economies including the U.S. and Japanese global share to plummet from 56 percent at present to less than half by 2030. The 2030 report also projected that at the rate the emerging economies are rising, by 2020 their market share of financial assets was expected to grow to almost double. China had outdone the U.S. as the world's topmost country in savings rate in 2008 (National Intelligence Council 2012).

A study by Nuno P. Monteiro of Yale University, argued that a unipolar system would lead to a condition in which major conflict-producing mechanisms are generated and the unipole, the U.S. in this case, is liable to get involved. He goes on to illustrate three types of wars that could take place in the world under unipolar conditions depending on the approach of the only established power. The first two wars are defensive and offensive dominance. These two kinds of wars would result in creating conflicts where the sole great power is pitted against other states. The third kind of war is an outcome of disengagement by the great power. This conflict would lead to bring about war among other states, as it leaves a vacuum to fill in. Furthermore, Monteiro is of the opinion that while the unipole is expected to come into unipolarity through a dominance strategy, after a certain period, it is feasible that the unipole changes its strategy to disengagement. Few limitations arise when this theory is applied to the present international framework with America being the most powerful single state. The reasons are - firstly, the unipolar (since the fall of the then USSR) era is very short a timeline to examine structural mechanisms. Secondly, it's been a tradition that the U.S. implements a strategy of dominance. Monteiro claims that the foreign policy strategy of the U.S. limits opportunities to assess his arguments regarding the consequences of disengagement (Monteiro 2011).

Reports from the influential think tanks in the US such as the Centre for Strategic Studies have also pointed out that the U.S. despite a relative power decline still maintains its role

as the dominant power with a global reach. However, they point out that the US decline as a power coupled with China's rapid growth (CPPR 2015).

Obama stepped into the presidency with an aim to revive America's position as the single most powerful and legitimate leader in world politics. The aim was to strengthen and recover American economy at the same time. Washington attempted to renew and reinforce America's global leadership at large and engage in Asia-Pacific, after having been drained and distracted by the wars in the Middle East and South Asia. Thus, Obama and his team seized the opportunity to rebalance US' strategies towards regions with growing geostrategic significance in order to maintain US superiority (Obama 2011, 12 November).

Congressional views were also changing. Senate hearing titled "Principles of U.S. Engagement in Asia" reflected the argument that the right time had arrived to prioritize and shift Washington's attention towards the Asia-Pacific region as it was growing in wealth (economy), even as the region confronted military and security challenges. According to this view, the United States fulfilled the standards to be an overriding power in Asia-Pacific while China, Russia, Japan, India and the other rising powers have only some of the elements of power such as growing GDPs. The Obama administration aimed to amalgamate both hard and soft power to form the rebalance strategy as the administration considered its political, security and economic interests in the region (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2010, 21 January, S. HRG. 111-708). The Congress also felt that the American strategic priorities needed to be fine-tuned to effectively amount to a rebalance strategy. In particular, the US military and economic interests needed to be balanced with its strategic and diplomatic priorities.

Literature on China's rise in Asia reveals various perspectives. Among them, theory of hegemonic stability theories (Beitelman 2012), which is a subset of realism has been widely debated. He argues that the rise of China and the other powers pose a big threat to both the foreign policy of the United States and the stability of the international system. He further argued that if the decline of the United States is an actual phenomenon then the U.S. and the rising states might get into confrontational conflict(s) over global or regional leadership position (Beitelman 2012).

Among the different realist schools of thought, defensive realists such as Stephen Walt cited “balance of threat” stating that the absence of anti-American balancing highlighted the accommodative strategies adopted America and therefore, allaying other’s fear of American dominance (Walt 2002).

However, the offensive realists argue the opposite of what the defensive realists assume (Mearsheimer 2001). Layne, in his study of “democratic realism”, states that American grand strategy implants in itself the mission to extend economic openness and democracy wherever it goes. Such a design stems from the conviction that America could thrive in boosting and promoting its influence, power and security at the regional and international levels both in a system involving “free market democracies” (Layne 2008).

Rebalance as a grand strategy, however, seemed to have coincided with America upholding Joseph Nye’s concept of ‘smart power’, an amalgamation of hard power and soft power, a term he coined in 2003 to counter argue the fallacy that soft power alone can generate efficient foreign policy (Nye Jr. 2009). On this view, smart power has appeared, in light of America’s need, to gain more approval and legitimacy in maintaining its top leadership roles in global affairs. Washington developed the idea of the need to start pursuing rebalance through ‘smart power’. Suzanne Nossel, who coined the phrase “smart power” along with Joseph Nye argued that policy makers must employ the ideas which liberal internationalism puts forward. This view suggests that an international system in which countries follow liberal democratic principles would be stable and the probability of war is less. Nossel asserted that the US Washington must utilize its resources in diplomatic, economic and military fields to promote its leadership role in the region. She also stated that America’s various goals such as “self-determination, human rights, free trade, the rule of law, economic development, and the quarantine and elimination of dictators and weapons of mass destruction (WMD)” could be achieved through the use of smart power (Nossel 2004).

In the article titled, “CSIS Commission on Smart Power: A Smarter More Secure America” published in 2007 then United States Deputy Secretary of State Richard L. Armitage and Joseph Nye stated that the image and influence of the U.S. were waning throughout the world. They also argued that the US should shift from drawing out fear

and antagonism to inspiring confidence and optimism so as to sustain its position as a leader in global affairs. The report emphasized that smart power must be wielded by the incoming President Barack Obama. Further, they argued that the use of smart power would help achieve “integrated strategy, resource base, and tool kit to achieve American objectives” (Armitage and Nye Jr. 2007).

The above stated view influenced the Obama administration as the statement by the then Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs Andrew J. Shapiro showed. He explained that the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs was created for the purpose joining the resources of the State Department and the Defense Department accompanied by innovation in the industrial as well as private sector to be able to support America’s partners and allies in Asia-Pacific. This was Washington’s foreign policy objectives. He also stated that the State Department and USAID were in charge of diplomacy and development in the region. Thus, he talked about the main organs/institutions in the U.S. government through which ‘smart power’ would be implemented (Shapiro 2009).

Joseph Nye, in “The Future of Power” (2011), also talked about power having the capability to influence others in order to attain the objectives the subject endeavors to achieve. He proposed three ways through which the subject accomplishes its goals: first of all, through the use of coercion (represented by sticks); secondly, by making payments (that is carrots); and thirdly, one can decide on utilizing persuasion and attraction, that is, ‘soft power’. The combination of these powers would be called ‘smart power’. Opting this kind of power and exercising it, would grant the state (either the United States or any powerful state) the ability to fight the challenges of the present era. With Asia’s growth in economic and population, the recent trends might lead to threatening the United States. However, according to Nye, the United States might not have to be anxious as China’s per capita is smaller than its own. As it would take years for China to purchase military equipments that is comparable to the U.S. military capability. He also pointed out that China faces challenges with states of the Asian region and needs to strengthen its soft power (Nye Jr. 2011).

Within the US government, it was believed that both Washington and Beijing have major obligations to attempt to cooperate instead of being hostile to each other and tackle

international and regional issues (Department of the Treasury 2016). Furthermore, the Obama Administration also endeavoured to cooperate and work together with regional allies, partners and organizations to tackle regional issues such as global financial stability, climate change, natural disasters, infectious disease, human trafficking, transnational crime, terrorism, Islamic extremism, cyber terrorism among others. China's rapid economic growth and increased assertiveness made America an attractive ally for several nations in Asia-Pacific, although challenges and uncertainty remained (U.S. Congressional Hearing, A Majority Staff Report 2014, 17 April, S. PRT. 113–24).

American engagement in East Asia did not enjoy the protection of important members in the Congress as U.S. commitment in the West Asia or Eastern Europe did. When members of Congress took up Asia-Pacific issues, they focused largely on China, US-China trade issues or human rights but did not comprehensively focus on the region as a whole or its significance as a region to American national strategic interests (U.S. Congressional Hearing 2011, 31 March, Serial No. 112 – 15).

The Obama Administration institutionalized the rebalance strategy in the first term and it did not wane in the second term. Till the end, however, Congressional disagreements created difficulties in the policy as it was often judged by Congress by assessing the Administration officials' assertiveness on China. Also, due to the existence of gridlock between the Administration and the Congress on several other domestic issues, there were delays in appointing important officials and ambassadors to the region. Another instance in October 2013 where congressional divisions led to the closedown of the government and resulted in directly affecting the progress of the policy was when President Obama withdrew from attending the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Indonesia and stay at home to resolve the crisis. In the meeting, Obama was supposed to move American trade and economic goals forward and even more importantly, be present at the East Asia Summit in the Philippines in which he planned to speak against Beijing's aggressiveness in the South China Sea. Several leaders of the Southeast Asian countries questioned if the U.S. political system was going to permit the continued support of Washington in the region. But, as the South China Sea

issue escalated, Congress' interest was drawn more positively towards the region (Connelly 2015).

However, according to Connelly, as the U.S. Senate refused to ratify the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), it obviously got difficult for the Obama Administration to ask other rising powers such as China play by the rule and respect international law (Connelly 2015). In addition, much effort was demanded from Washington during both the terms of the Obama Administration, more so in the second term as President Xi Jinping turned out to be tougher than his predecessor President Hu Jintao. He further argued that during the second term of the Administration, the rebalance policy experienced a bumpy ride, to a certain level, due to lack of point-persons, complexities in the Congress, shortage of comprehensive strategy to execute the rebalance policy, the increasing difficulty to deal with China, deficiency of resources and appearance of other problems in other regions of the world such as in Europe (e.g., Ukraine crisis) and the West Asia (e.g., ISIS problems) (Connelly 2015).

Political and Diplomatic Strategy

Rebalancing policy to Asia-Pacific region became Obama Administration's political and diplomatic signature rhythm by the fall of 2011. Some of the congressional hearings showed US policy makers' and White House officials' heightened focus on Asia-Pacific's strategic significance. The Senate hearing (111-708) of "Principles of U.S. Engagement in Asia" on 21 January 2010 at the U.S. Senate, Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Committee on Foreign Relations. At this congressional hearing, senators such as James Henry Webb Jr (D - Virginia) and James M. Inhofe (R - Oklahoma), then Assistant Secretary of State Kurt M. Campbell, Director of Programs, Freedom House, Washington DC, Robert Herman and Robert Sutter, Visiting Professor of Asian, Studies, Georgetown University were among the witnesses who testified on the ever growing importance of the Asia-Pacific and the Obama Administration's engagement in the region (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2010, 21 January, S. HRG. 111-708).

The Senate hearing on “Maritime Territorial Disputes and Sovereignty Issues in Asia” before the Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations was held on 20 September 2012. During this congressional hearing, senators Jim Webb (D – Virginia), Richard G. Lugar (R – Indiana), and James Elroy Risch (R – Idaho) were present. Senator James M. Inhofe, (R – Oklahoma), Ranking Member of the Subcommittee, submitted a prepared statement that was part of the hearing. Kurt Campbell also testified during the hearing. The testimonies reflected that America wanted to pursue freedom of navigation and protect the maritime waters in the Asia – Pacific, especially against China’s aggression (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2012, 20 September, S. HRG. 112-610).

Obama’s Administration declared through a report *Setting Priorities for American Leadership: A New National Security Strategy for the United States* published in 2013, its objectives in conducting diplomatic relations. The report stated America’s global role as, “The advancement of an open, rules-based international order that promotes universal values of liberty, democracy, human dignity, and economic freedom is essential to the security and economic vitality of the United States”(Goldgeier and Volker 2013).

Building strong political-diplomatic environment against the backdrop of China’s rise and tensions persisting in the region allowed scholars to warn that the situation and conditions of the international system warranted conflict as China wished to climb up the hegemonic-power ladder and become a regional hegemonic power in the Asia-Pacific region by attempting to force America out of its area of influence (Mearsheimer 2010).

In *International Security*, Randall Schweller and Xiaoyu Pu argued that the relations could be put under different categories. First, there was a possibility where China could be a spoiler to substitute U.S. hegemony. Second was that the US and China had the option to act in concert (under the proposed G-2). Third, China was also presumed to become a shirker wherein it would try to reap as much gains as it could under American hegemony before it attempted to form a world order on its own terms (Schweller and Pu 2011).

Literature also revealed that several Asian countries began to grow towards America leadership in the region. Threatened by North Korea's belligerence, various allies and partners of the U.S. such as Japan considered getting their own nuclear weapon. Australia entered into an accord to host American forces on within its territory. Analysts also pointed out that Singapore also turned out to be a quasi-ally to the U.S. while cultivating strong ties to China (Choong 2011).

Chinese perception of Obama's rebalance strategic framework as "Strategic Encirclement" collided with its regional hegemonic rise. Since the beginning of 1990s, China was accompanied by rapidly expanding military including long-range power projection in the regional conflict spots especially East and South China Seas where, as America would later claim, the US naval power never left from the time when the second world war ended. America including its allies in Asia-Pacific and Europe started realizing the need for a renewed strategy in the Asia and Pacific region and to direct Pentagon to prioritize and shift a good amount of its focus and resources to the region. This question became increasingly apparent in the wake of potential and escalating tension over the disputed islands such as Senkaku Islands, Paracel Islands, Spratly Islands and zones of influence which could possibly lead to perilous armed conflict jeopardizing global trade routes and stability in the region and the world. Layne writes on hegemonic challenges, titled "China's Challenge to US Hegemony" released in 2008, pointing out that China's rise would be undoubtedly marked with geopolitical turmoil, but a full-fledged war between the U.S. and China was not unavoidable. "Engagement and containment are "ideal type" grand strategies toward China." He further argued that when it comes to off-shore balancing strategy, Washington would be relying more on its allies such as Japan and India that would depend on a balance-of-power dynamic (Layne 2008).

Others viewed this differently. Koehane, for instance, has pointed out that these rising countries might not want to see China rising aggressively faster than them. To them, he argued that throughout this crisis, commercial and financial interdependence could still impact relations (Koehane 2005).

In addition to the events in the Asia-Pacific, Japan was also pushing to reconsider its position in the global political scenario. According to Takashi Inoguchi, Japan emerged

from different phases into the present condition. By 2005, in Inoguchi's opinion, Japan went on to aim for "ordinary power" status from just being an economic superpower. Japan even assisted the U.S. in counter-terrorism by sending Self-Defense forces to foreign lands (Inoguchi 2008).

Japan's trajectory in shifting from a peace-state to an international state (Singh 2013), and the U.S.-Japan alliance focus on fighting against modern threats, especially, the swift growth of Chinese military, and its increasing assertiveness in territorial disputes with the concerned Asian countries including Japan (Slavin and Carroll 2014) added to the debate in the US and the Asia-Pacific region. The focus was on how Washington's rebalancing policy was giving emphasis to the need for stronger push for institutionalized efforts toward cooperation and engagement with Japan.

Bonnie S. Glaser, an influential analyst in a leading think tank in Washington DC wrote that Washington would need to act and take steps in order to maintain "an overall cooperative" ties with Beijing. She also asserted that the Obama administration needed to minimise any unnecessary misgiving Beijing might have had towards the US. In China's view, the US sought to "encircle and contain" Beijing's interests in the region. Thus, Glaser said that unwanted anti-Beijing rhetoric that increased tensions between the US and China was to be abandoned (Glaser 2012).

The Chinese, however, believed that Washington employed "democratic peace theory" to destabilize and challenge countries with different political systems the U.S. rejects and dominate (*The China Daily* 2013).

The strategic rebalance policy in the region was driven by the US' aspiration to restore confidence in its allies, partners and other countries that the U.S. was in Asia and the Pacific, and was aiming to stay without getting distracted by its involvement in West Asia or its domestic economic and political issues. However, Kenneth Lieberthal, among others has shown that there were other factors that would have contributed to the success of the rebalance strategy such as addressing America's domestic fiscal and political instability. Thus, part of the literature seemed to be arguing about how to put the American domestic house in order (Lieberthal 2011).

Despite America's domestic political concerns, the Obama Administration repeatedly stated its support toward growing powers such as China, India and others. Echoing this sentiment, Jeffrey Bader, then Senior Director for Asian Affairs on the National Security Council, opined that the United States and China could join hands and work in concert to resolve perilous issues and conflicts across the world. These efforts could lead to laying the foundations for constructing a "new type of great power relationship". However, according to this new power relationship, there were certain elements that could be responsible for cooperation or conflict such as building bilateral economic relations; focusing on international issues where the United States and China might have uneven influence due to their power capacity, for instance, climate change; political and security contest in the Asia-Pacific region between Beijing's military capabilities and Washington's rebalancing efforts; and both the countries' attempts at resolving issues in the third world countries – so called "hot spots" (Bader 2013).

On the diplomatic front, studies have revealed that the Obama Administration attempted to get back to the center of Asia-Pacific politics which was witnessed when it came to supporting and engaging with regional structures. However, the central idea was not about American disengagement or re-engagement but of priorities and emphasizing on the already existing complex groundwork of the U.S. – Asia relations. Starting with the effort of signing the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) with ASEAN in 2009; President Obama's presence in the East Asia Summit in November 2011 for the first time in the history of American Presidents; Washington also tried to help fund ASEAN through Economic Support Fund (ESF); the U.S. also proposed areas of cooperation such as non-proliferation, trade facilitation initiatives through APEC and so forth, disaster preparedness and regional agreements immediately after the announcement of the rebalance strategy (Cropsey 2014).

Even if human rights issues and democracy were not mentioned explicitly and vividly in the broad strategic framework of the rebalance policy, these issues certainly hovered around as pertinent concerns in international politics space as well largely as a product of the Arab Spring, as a result of which, to a certain degree, then Secretary Clinton's visit to Burma came into being (Quinn 2011).

The most contentious issue in the Asia-Pacific region has been the maritime one, China focussed a great deal on strengthening its maritime capabilities as it is a “manifestation of ‘prestige strategies’ pursued by governments seeking greater domestic legitimacy (Johnson and Ross, ed. 2009).” The aim was to be able to secure the important trade routes and crucial water bodies for which the powerful players are in conflict in the Asia-Pacific waters. According to the Chinese, the U.S. was one of these powerful players. Beijing believed that the US became more assertive and practical in moulding the security structure in the region to fulfil American interests and that the rebalance policy to Asia had the sole objective of containing China (Xinbo 2012). Nonetheless, Obama went on to refute the claims saying, "Our goal is not to counter China. Our goal is not to contain China" (Obama and Aquino III 2014, 28 April).

Commentaries and analysis from 2011 have continued to focus on the imperatives for Obama administration in its pursuit of the rebalance policy. Well known experts such as Price underscored that development such as Obama’s eight-day visit to Asia in April 2014 was a strong diplomatic gesture to renovate reliability, cooperation and promises underpinning the rebalance strategy towards the countries of the region including China. Many analysts including Price pointed out that in order to foster deeper and stronger ties with the allies in the region, President Obama continued to visit Washington’s main allies such as Japan, Malaysia, Philippines and South Korea, and partners such as India (Price 2015). Policy makers and experts felt the need to reinforce relations between Washington and its allies and partners in the Asia-Pacific region.

In fact, Congressional hearings of the period 2014-2017 reflect the growing concern regarding the opportunities and challenges for the US in the Asia-Pacific. For instance, on 26 February 2015, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific conducted a hearing on the subject, “Across the Other Pond: U.S. Opportunities and Challenges in the Asia Pacific”, Abraham M. Denmark, Senior Vice President, at the National Bureau of Asian Research reiterated the fact that the Obama Administration needed to strengthen its relations with America’s allies and partners in the region against China’s increasing assertiveness (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, Serial No. 114–8, 26 February).

Thus, the political dimension of Obama's rebalancing strategy to Asia was deeply impacted by the prevailing geopolitical conditions, Congressional reactions and impact by expert analysis.

Military-Security Dimension

Rebalance strategy became Obama Administration's grand strategy according to Drezner. He argues that a well articulated grand strategy accompanied by consistent actions is mostly needed when a country is faced with uncertainties as it could be used as a "signaling device" to send messages to allies/partners and foes (Drezner 2011). This was clearly reflected in President Obama's statement that even as Washington planned the future of American armed forces, the military's existence and operation in the Asia Pacific region was a top priority. He also reaffirmed that America's defense expenditure of the region would not be affected (Obama 2011, 17 November).

Bumiller has focused on how the US defence study synchronized with the American values and interests. As the then Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta commented America's military presence in the Pacific was there for a long time but needed to be reinforced as China escalated its assertiveness in the East and South China Seas combined with upsetting lack of transparency (Bumiller 2011).

Furthermore, even during Obama's first term, Washington had already started moving a large section of its naval deployment toward the region, despite the decisions about defense cuts. As Department of Defense (DOD) brought out the report "Strategic Guidance" in 2012, the administration's plans were reflected alongside the announcement of sending 2,500 marine troops to Australia. Authors such as Klingner wrote and assessed the developments. The properly planned deployment of troops to Australia and Singapore in the beginning phases of rebalancing period and subsequent signing of defense pacts with other allies such as Japan, South Korea and Philippines carved out a path for securing collective capacity and capability for securing common interests in the region (Klingner 2015; Department of Defense 2012).

Again, strategic analysts had focused on how after the U.S. Defense Strategy Review Report came out in January 2012, China's response was that they paid "attention to" the

strategic defense guidelines and will ‘closely watch out for’ the influence of the new U.S. policy shift on the security situation of the Asia-Pacific region and the world at large” (Chen 2013). So, the literature on the US’ Asia-Pacific strategy increasingly reflected Chinese response to it.

Further, asserting the importance of military-security dimension, the report *Setting Priorities for American Leadership: A New National Security Strategy for the United States*, published by the Atlantic Council in 2013, stated, “U.S. military’s global pre-eminence is vital to both protecting American values and interests and providing the infrastructure for integrating American values and interests and providing the infrastructure for integrating the efforts of other allies and partners” (Goldgeier and Volker 2013).

Congressional involvement reflected the changing strategic imperatives and constraints the US faced. The Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs hearing on “Rebalance to Asia II: Security and Defense; Cooperation and Challenges” on 25 April 2013 clearly marked the increased importance of the military dimension of the policy. Senator Benjamin L. Cardin (D – Maryland) chaired the congressional hearing. The following experts presented (in person/writing) their testimonies during the hearing: Janine Davidson, Senior Fellow, Center for a New American Security, Washington, DC; Michael J. Green, Senior Vice President for Asia and Japan Chair, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC; David F. Helvey, Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asia, Office of Security and Defense, U.S. Department of Defense, Washington, DC; Marco Rubio, U.S. Senator (R – Florida) who also gave the opening statement; Joseph Y. Yun, Acting Assistant Secretary, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, Washington, DC (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2013, 25 April, S. HRG. 113-138). The hearing looked into the administration’s defense-security commitments and various challenges it faced in the region. It also dealt with the rebalance policy to see if it was pursuing the objectives of the administration to reinforce strategic relationships with allies, partners while building positive ties with Beijing. The hearing also emphasized on the need to strengthen regional

structures which could act as forums in which conflicts get resolved and common challenges are handled (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2013, 25 April, S. HRG. 113-138).

Several analysts have focused on the links between the domestic tussle of budget cuts on defense and US' extended military deployments in Asia-Pacific as part of rebalance strategy. For instance, Muni and Chadha wrote that there were a few aspects that defined the military-security move toward the region such as withdrawal of troops from the West Asia (Muni and Chadha eds. 2014) theatre by prioritizing Asia-Pacific region; despite the cut down in defense spending, the decision to maintain widespread military arrangements and deployments in the region; the Obama Administration gave equal importance stretching from the Indian Ocean throughout South Asia, Southeast Asia, Pacific, Northeast Asia till the farthest tip of East Asia; growing development of strategic initiatives such as Air-Sea Battle model in order to offset increasing 'Anti-Access/Area Denial' attempts in the region especially by Beijing in the disputed waters in Taiwan region as well as down the Chinese maritime rim (Sutter et. al. 2013).

By the end of Obama's first term, the policy seemed to hint towards a desire for cooperation and stability with China. A large number of works, however, pointed to the row in the South China Sea that included the Philippines and Malaysia who had boundary conflicts with China. Thuy, for instance, argued that Obama Administration repeatedly showed restraint by staying away from any direct confrontation with China or any other Asian country but advised them to resolve territorial or water disputes through multilateral arrangements and cooperation, through the adoption of a 'code of conduct' (Thuy 2011).

This view has also been supported by others like Banyan and Thayer. Banyan has called out American's demonstration of apparent unwillingness in 2012 to lend military or any other form of strong and visible support to the Philippines when Beijing captured the Scarborough Shoal, despite of the fact that there was already a bilateral defense agreement between both the countries as a serious limitation of its Asia-Pacific rebalance policy (Banyan 2014). The other incident which testifies US' restraint was USS Cowpens (CG-63) incident of December 2013, which also revealed possibilities of potential mishaps occurring engaging naval vessels and military aircraft. Following the incident

the U.S. Pacific Fleet stated, “This incident underscores the need to ensure the highest standards of professional seamanship, including communications between vessels, to mitigate the risk of an unintended incident or mishap” (Thayer 2013). Thus, Thayer highlighted US Pacific naval fleets operating standards.

Furthermore, in matters of increased American military presence in the region, the Chinese perceived it as an act of unfolding cold war mentality, which would come into conflict with the any inclination toward bringing peace, development or cooperation in the Asia and the Pacific. Li underscored how China perceived American actions as confrontational (Li 2014). China definitely held the view that the U.S.’ rebalance strategy in Asia was driven by “cold War mentality”, which could backfire Washington’s rebalance strategy in Asia (Linfei and Wei 2011). Over the last few years, tensions escalated in the region, over regional flashpoints such as North Korean nuclear issue and the territorial disputes in South and East China Seas. The fear had been that the present strain over these issues could lead to acute destabilization of security and stability in the region (Li 2014).

Obama’s alliance politics has also been discussed within the framework of military dimension. Kim and others marked the signalling by the US to its allies such as South Korea. Even Obama’s 2014 visit was perceived by allies such as South Korea and Malaysia as positive signal demonstrating assurance and camaraderie in securing peace and stability. Obama’s visit to South Korea was intentionally utilized to reaffirm Washington’s commitment and friendship. At the summit, between President Obama and President Park Geun-hye, certain crucial diplomatic matters were discussed such as re-evaluate a further holdup of the transfer of the 2015 scheduled wartime operational control (OPCON) of South Korean forces back to South Korea from the United States. In the backdrop, the North Korean nuclear test issue was looming (Kim 2014).

Even with its traditional ally the Philippines, EDCA (Enhanced Defense Co-operation Agreement), a divisive 10-year defense agreement, was signed, which would permit increased joint military training exercises, frequent rotation of U.S. troops, warplanes, ships all the way through the islands. Philippine Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario described by stating, "The EDCA elevates to a higher plane of engagement our already

robust defense alliance". President Obama, however, went on to confirm that the defense pact was not to contain China, with whom Manila is stuck in a serious territorial dispute (*BBC* 2014, 28 April). Nevertheless, this defense pact was negatively perceived by Beijing (*BBC* 2014, 29 April).

Then senior director for Asian affairs on the National Security Council, Evan Medeiros, at a press conference in Kuala Lumpur reaffirmed the need to preserve and maintain America's commitment to its allies and security partners in the region. He further argued that the US objectives in the region are interlinked to the security threats faced by its alliance partners and security partners such as Japan and South Korea. He cited the example of challenges posed by North Korean nuclear threat in the Korean peninsula (Rhodes and Medeiros 2014).

On China, Evan Medeiros underscored the fact that the US desired to build constructive ties with China. He also highlighted that Washington and Beijing "made a serious effort at improving our military-to-military ties". He went on to state that the US would support efforts that would help build productive relations between countries in the region and China (Rhodes and Medeiros 2014).

While on South China Sea, Evan Medeiros articulated that Washington would counter any act of "intimidation, coercion or aggression" by any country in the Asia-Pacific region, in order to claim territories in international waters, with the help of allies and partners so that they do not become victims of territorial conflicts (Rhodes and Medeiros 2014).

The Congressional views on military dimension of rebalancing strategy are largely available in hearings such as "U.S. Economic and Military Alliances in Asia". The witnesses included experts such as Randall Schriver, President and Chief Executive Officer, Project 2049 Institute; Walter Lohman, Director, Asian Studies Center, The Heritage Foundation; Balbina Hwang, Ph.D., visiting Professor, School of International Service, American University; and James L. Schoff, Senior Associate, Asia Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Matt Salmon (R - Arizona's 5th district), Chairman of the Subcommittee presided the congressional hearing. The hearing focused

on “the status of our alliances in the region and evaluate strategies to maximize their mutual benefit in the face of a new era of security challenges and great power competition” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 15 July, Serial No. 114–73).

Another important congressional hearing which emphasized on “America’s Security Role in the South China Sea” at Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, House Committee on Foreign Affairs took place on 23 July 2015. Senator Scott Perry, acting Chairman of the Subcommittee, (R – Pennsylvania’s 4th district) presided the hearing. The hearing discussed America’s role in South China Sea security architecture (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 23 July, Serial No. 114 – 77).

Economic Dimension and the Rebalance

As the Obama administration launched its rebalance policy, Washington proclaimed that it desired to operate in an economic atmosphere which was open and transparent. Alongside Obama’s rebalancing efforts, European Economic Union and Russia also shifted their attention to the region (Bond 2017; Department of Commerce 2014, 17 April).

Experts such as Lampton stated that the United States saw the need to work with China as responsible leaders to stabilize the global economy, global ecosystem and global security (Lampton 2009). Then Assistant Secretary Campbell also stated that the closeness between Asia-Pacific countries and the United States was most evident in the economic relations. The region accounted for roughly one-third of global GDP. He said that the US’ dynamic economic relations and free trade with the region was going to be an important area of the rebalance policy. The Obama administration also encouraged the rising economies in Asia to participate in regional and global institutions such as APEC, the WTO, and the G-20. The administration saw this as a means to strengthen America’s economic stability and interests in the region (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2010, 3 March, Serial No. 111–115).

On the other hand, law makers such as Senator Jeff Sessions (Republican - Alabama) argued that TPP would have a deteriorating effect on the US economy. He continued to dispute that TPP was unnecessary as the US already had bilateral trade agreements with

important countries (Australia, Chile, Singapore, Mexico, Canada and Peru) which were included in TPP (Breitbart 2015). However, supporters of TPP and the rebalance policy in the Congress argued that the economic diplomatic card could forge cooperative ties between the U.S. and the Asian countries, and even with China. Its significance in the entire rebalance policy was revealed by events including the U.S. recognizing the Asian economic hub as a booming financial region that could not be ignored anymore; America's desire to cooperate and amalgamate its economy with Asia's rising economies and growing multilateral economic arrangements; the U.S.' involvement in the TPP along with other eleven countries; and, Washington's efforts to increase its foreign assistance by seven percent to the Asia-Pacific region. The TTP was created to be a forum where the U.S. was able to play a chief leadership role, without China's interference (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2011, 31 March, Serial No. 112 – 15).

Economic diplomacy was an important part of the grand strategy. Obama administration believed that if it had to achieve greater economic engagement in the region, it had to build a number of networks of bilateral trade agreements with both allies and partners (old and new ones) so that liberal trade access to American markets was made possible, coupled with increase in developmental assistance. Several regional institutions in the Asia-Pacific region carried out unique functions such as ASEAN +3 (includes China, Japan and Korea) was recommended to be the core body for financial co-operation in East Asia and the APEC was expected to go on functioning as the centre for countries to address issues of trans-economic cooperation (Caballero-Anthony 2008).

This was also reflected in the Congressional hearing "Rebalance to Asia IV: Economic Engagement in the Asia Pacific Region" It focused on the economic engagement issues (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2013, 18 December, S. HRG. 113–182). In another important US congressional hearing, the economic importance of the region and the need to improve economic engagement with its allies was addressed. An important economy and ally, Japan, is the world's third largest economy and America's fourth largest trading partner. In 2012, it was recorded that the U.S. exported \$70 billion in goods to Japan. Japan started to formally take part on the negotiating tables of the TPP in 2013 during the 18th round of negotiations in Malaysia. TPP countries represented around 40% of global

GDP and about one-third of the whole global trade. Another major ally and economic partner of the United States in the region is South Korea. The KORUS trade agreement came into force on 15 March 2012. The agreement improved trade relations between the two countries (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 15 July, Serial No. 114–73). Even if the executive branch has greater and more observable role in foreign policy decision-making process, the legislature’s less noticeable direct/indirect influence in foreign policy directions is still relevant and necessary argued Linda I. Fowler (Fowler 2011).

Scot A. Marciel, then Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, remarked that America’s economic relations with Singapore was rapidly growing. He also stated that around 2,000 American companies are based in Singapore which “accounted for \$26 billion in foreign direct investment stock in the United States at the end of 2012”. He also highlighted the upward trend in the United States-Australia trade and investment ties because of the free trade agreement between the two allies. The United States is Australia's leading investment partner. Marciel also noted that between the US and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) economic engagement was deep. Obama administration and the ASEAN states also agreed to start the Expanded Economic Engagement (E3) initiative, an agreement to enhance economic relations between the United States and ASEAN. This agreement was also launched to prepare the countries in ASEAN to join TPP (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2013, 18 December, S. HRG. 113–182).

For ‘rebalance’ to achieve what it wanted, economic diplomacy had to be given the amount of attention it required to stand as one of the vital structures of the grand strategy. Officials in Washington concurred to this. For instance, then Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker, during her visit to the ASEAN region, in 2014, elaborated on the “economic dimension of this commitment, which includes deepening trade and investment ties with existing partners, building the soft and hard infrastructure necessary to support the growth of emerging partners” (Department of Commerce 2014, 6 June 2014).

Well known foreign policy experts at CSIS such as Matthew P. Goodman and Michael J. Green stated that countries in Asia-Pacific were concerned about Beijing’s growing

assertiveness in the region. As a result, he argued that American leadership and increased economic engagement in the region was needed to sustain balance of power. Goodman also said that the U.S. economy strategy in the Asia-Pacific region was driven by three main objectives which were: first of all, critical source of growth and jobs at home; secondly, to uphold and update the rules of the international economy; and lastly, to support U.S.' long-term presence in the region. Washington's approach was trans-pacific rather than Asia-centric; and it emphasized high standards of liberalization and rule-making. At home, under the Department of Commerce, according to the International Trade Administration (ITA), "In 2013, seven of our top twenty-one priority export markets were located in Asia and forty-one percent of the clients we counseled worldwide, were interested in doing business in the EAP region" (Goodman and Green 2013; U.S. Congressional Hearings 2013, 18 December, S. HRG. 113-182).

For better growth momentum, however, a great deal of focus was to be given to strengthening and building up regional machineries in order to promote the prompt emergence of growing Asian economies, empowering them to cross the threshold, getting into the international investment and trade system which included the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the Association for Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). At the same time, Washington being indisputably concerned about its economy resurgence and health wanted to "Establish and strengthen relationships that will help promote U.S. business and support job creation in both the United States and the ASEAN region" (Department of Commerce 2014, 17 April).

According to reports in 2014, while U.S. imports from China boosted by 9.6 percent year-on-year, U.S. exports to China dropped by 16.7 percent month-on-month. The year 2014 saw only 0.9 percent increase in U.S. exports to China from 2013 (US-China Economic and Security Review Commission 2014, 4 June). In this way, the U.S. economy suffered trade deficit in goods with China. Increasing deficit was witnessed just in July 2014 at \$30.9 billion which is \$1 billion higher than the July deficit last year. Nevertheless, on the bright side, U.S. exports to China in goods improved by 6.9 percent year-on-year in July which surpassed imports which also rose by 3.5 percent (US-China

Economic and Security Review Commission 2014, 4 September). In this context, experts such as Feigenbaum had said that strategic environment in East Asia was changing due to China's economic growth. Economic cooperation between the United States and the Asian countries especially China was deemed necessary as the region became an economic hub. Feigenbaum also suggested that economic cooperation could powerfully underpin the case of structuring and bringing about resolution(s) to security issues and territorial disputes through negotiations and security cooperation frameworks (Feigenbaum 2011).

Rebalancing towards smaller economies was just as vital as Washington's security commitment to sustain the rebalancing in the Asia and Pacific region. Building stronger economic ties with Taiwan, which is among America's top thirteen trading partners, was important even if it got difficult at times due to China's bullying of Taiwan. Derek M Scissors, Ph.D., resident scholar, American Enterprise Institute, Washington, DC said that India was another difficult country to deal with whenever it came to the negotiating table. Washington wanted it to undergo fundamental liberalization of its rural land ownership policies, economic exchanges across its own country and labor laws. Indonesia and the Philippines were two countries waiting to join the TPP which were important members of ASEAN and had high potential market resources and growth. Indonesia and the Philippines both the countries needed to undergo changes in their domestic policies to gain from TPP and bilateral economic ties at the regional and international levels both (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2013, 18 December, S. HRG. 113-182).

Makinen opined that while Obama administration launched TPP as the economic pillar of the rebalance policy, Beijing pursued its own bilateral trade agreements with America's allies such as Australia (China's sixth largest trading partner) and South Korea. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank which came into force on 25 December 2015 was one of the regional institutions launched by China which the U.S. and Japan refused to join. Another Chinese trade initiative was the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) which officially commenced in November 2012 at the ASEAN Summit in Cambodia. This initiative included the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian

Nations (ASEAN) with six other countries including China, Japan, Australia, India, New Zealand and South Korea. It accounted for around 30% of global gross domestic product. All these regional institutions which China started ran parallel to TPP (Makinen 2015).

Beijing also launched another massive initiative – the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), an important part of China’s One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative created on 22 May 2013 to integrate the economies of Eurasia by means of belts and roads along with the help of additional infrastructure projects. China launched the OBOR as component of it’s strategy to counter American initiatives in the region. China aimed to achieve a peaceful rise as a great power through economic schemes such as \$ 40 billion Silk Road Fund and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Washington’s rebalance policy in Asia-Pacific involved economic initiatives aimed at building closer economic relations with the countries of South East Asia and India along with focused interest in South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. This fact created uneasiness for China in respect to its economic goals in the region (Ali 2016).

Experts argued stating that the level of commitment exhibited by Obama Administration’s officials declined by the beginning of the second term and even the allocation of resources was limited to sustain such as huge task of engaging in Asia. Strong point-persons such as Hillary Clinton and Kurt Campbell having left their posts and the outcomes of the new leadership raised the question of Washington’s credibility in continuing its strategic prominence in the Asia-Pacific. America still needed to achieve its strategic goals in the region, but the question remained, how (Tsai 2013).

Thus, the survey of the literature indicated that while rebalance policy was announced, the process of decision making and execution of the policy needed to be examined. Other areas that call for attention in the proposed thesis are to examine whether the Obama administration used “smart power” to counter China’s peaceful rise, whether the rebalancing strategy succeeded or failed and also analyze the difference between the first term and second term of the Obama Administration with regards to the implementation of the policy. Hence, the thesis attempts to answer these gaps.

Definition, Rationale and Scope of Study

Obama Administration announced to shift its strategic priorities by increasing its engagement in the Asia – Pacific. The administration aimed to engage in the region in a wide range of issues – military, political and economic issues. “Rebalance” policy was the outcome. The administration wanted to emphasize and prioritize its relations with its allies and partners while building new ones. It also aimed at rejuvenating its existing alliance system. Even if the US still retained its position as the dominant military, economic and political power in the visible international political horizon, the mounting pressure and challenges on America’s status quo by rising powers in the Asia-Pacific could not be ignored any longer.

The study attempts an in-depth analysis of the Obama administration’s rebalance policy. Also, the timing and the policy process were significant. The study also locates the policy both in the executive branch of the federal bureaucracy and the Congress. It examines the casual linkages between the Congressional initiatives and policy. It also looks at the three dimensions of the policy in order to give a comprehensive understanding of how and why such a policy was projected by the Obama administration. Further, it explores the limitations of the policy with a view to critically assess the level of success the policy had achieved.

The need for such a study was apparent in the aftermath of President Trump’s election, especially, when he announced the US withdrawal from TPP. Thus, the study examines shifts in American engagement in Asia-Pacific.

Research Problem/Questions

1. Did Obama Administration promote Asia-Pacific as a regional strategic priority?
2. Point persons such as then Secretary of State Clinton, then Assistant Secretary Campbell and few others, how did they affect the rebalancing policy in Asia-Pacific? Did the policy enjoy a bipartisan support in the Congress?
3. Did Obama Administration pursue the policy throughout both the first and the second term?

4. Was the Administration able to successfully maintain and honour treaties in the region with allies such as Japan, South Korea, Australia and the Philippines while Chinese hardliners perceived the “rebalance” policy as a containment strategy?
5. How did “smart power” facilitate in revitalizing America’s relations with its old allies and partners while establishing new ones? Out of the three – political/diplomatic, military and economic – which one was strongest under the rebalance policy?
6. Was “rebalance” policy able to lessen tensions in maritime territorial disputes and even threats emanating from North Korean missile build-up?
7. Could Obama Administration’s “rebalancing” policy strengthen America’s role in the Asia-Pacific? What were the successes and failures of the policy?

Hypotheses

1. Obama Administration’s rebalancing policy to the Asia-Pacific facilitated and preserved US interests in a pluralistic security order while ensuring that no single regional power dominated.
2. Through the rebalancing strategy, the US significantly aligned Asia’s economic development to security strategy against China.
3. U.S. strategic “rebalancing” evoked support of Japan, South Korea, Australia and the Philippines while Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam were ambivalent, whereas, India remained a swing state.

Research Methods

The proposed research will employ secondary sources to get an extensive knowledge in the field; as well as resources from the Jawaharlal Nehru University and American Centre Library. Along with this, the proposed work would extensively rely on primary sources: government foreign policy statements, congressional debates, hearings and reports, political remarks and speeches, treaties and agreements, interview reports, historical biographies and organizational policy papers. This study has employed deductive method. It has also used mixed method.

While examining the three hypotheses, the variables such as national interests, external actors and domestic policies are grouped into the category of independent variables due to their role in influencing the bilateral and multilateral relations in the Asia-Pacific region. The dependent variables such as interdependence, policy approaches and responses form the line of inquiry in the study. The intervening variable is the state capacity in changing the rules, while maintaining the status quo forms another dimension of analysis.

Therefore, this study has attempted to generate empirical evidence to prove that the U.S. rebalancing efforts to the Asia-Pacific region was pushed forward by the Obama Administration as a foreign policy strategy. This was done to achieve its strategic goals and gain much needed superpower legitimacy.

Tentative Chapters

1. **Introduction:** The introductory chapter plans to include the synopsis in the proposed thesis.
2. **Perspectives and Declaration of the “Rebalance” Policy to the Asia-Pacific Region:** The second chapter intends to highlight the policy’s background and different views and arguments of experts. The chapter also presents the details of the evolution and declaration of rebalance strategy under the Obama Administration.
3. **Political and Diplomatic Strategy:** The chapter seeks to focus on the political and diplomatic aspect of the rebalance policy. Washington’s purposes and projections of partnerships, alliances and relations in the Asia-Pacific both at the bilateral and regional multilateral levels are highlighted.
4. **Military-Security Dimension:** The proposed chapter aims at tracing America’s military commitment to the Asia-Pacific region. It would look into America’s expansion, nature and goals of military expansion and deployment in the region under rebalance policy.
5. **Economic Aspects of the Rebalance Strategy:** This chapter tentatively focuses on bringing out the economic facet of the rebalance strategic framework. The efforts

Obama Administration made to reconstruct, elevate and improve its economy, and manage its economic relations with allies, regional structures and other countries especially China are discussed in detail.

6. **Conclusion:** The last chapter recommends giving emphasis on drawing conclusion from the previous chapters. It aims to present the ultimate observations and outcomes produced by the proposed study.

Chapter 2

Perspectives and Declaration of the Rebalance Policy to the Asia-Pacific Region

Introduction

In the 21st century, the prevailing question is whether American primacy still remains intact. The attack by terrorists on the U.S. soil on 9 September 2001 was one such event which exposed the vulnerability of the U.S. Despite, the retaliatory American attack on Afghanistan and Iraq, terrorist threats continued, which was perceived as a further indication of dwindling U.S. hegemony in the world. The financial crisis of 2008 which began in the U.S. was observed as yet another sign of waning U.S. power in the world. Meanwhile, other powers began to increase their influence and power. China's economy has been galloping, giving it much leverage in world economic affairs. Nations like India, Brazil, South Africa, Turkey and Russia were experiencing impressive economic growth. In addition, these economies were less affected by the financial crisis of 2008 comparing to the European Union (EU) and the U.S. The reduction of the U.S. power and influence in the world was accompanied by rising influence of China and India and a few other nations in Asia-Pacific. Obama administration realized the need to develop a strategic policy to revitalize its influence and power in global affairs and more importantly, lead and benefit from Asia's rise by engaging with and in the region (Department of State 2010, 12 January).

Perspectives of the Rebalance Policy to the Asia-Pacific Region

In the literature on post 9/11 World Order, many analysts, even from the US, have pointed to major changes in the power structures of the world. Rise of Asia and decline of the West was the central theme in: Kishore Mahbubani's *The New Asian Hemisphere: the Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East* (Mahbubani 2009); Parag Khanna's, *The Second World: Empires and influence in the New Global Order* (Khanna 2008); and *The Post-American World: And the Rise of the Rest*, by Fareed Zakaria (Zakaria 2009).

A rather different formulation of Zakaria has been that the U.S. relative power is not declining significantly but he observed that there has been rise of other powers, especially

both China and India. He noted that China and India are challenging the U.S. primarily through their soft power diplomacy. Nevertheless, he conceded that the U.S. is experiencing economic decline rather than a geopolitical decline. Moreover, the discourse on the world politics also revealed definite trends: (a) decline of the U.S. power yet remaining as the sole hegemon in a unipolar world; (b) power transition is underway between a declining U.S. and rising China, also occurring slowly in the backdrop of new emerging economies, such as India, Brazil and South Africa, all of which happen to be political and strategic heavyweights in their respective regions; (c) two predominant and opposed narrative concerning the rapid enrichment and empowerment of Asia's largest societies creating wealth and power resulting in competition and turbulence; (d) Quadrilateral, trilateral, bilateral and multilateral framework approach for coping with emerging China particularly in the Asia-Pacific region (Zakaria 2009).

Unipolarity engaged policy-makers, subject experts and foreign policy analysts in the U.S. to think from the time when the Cold War ended and the "unipolar moment" was declared (Krauthammer 1991). Liberal theorists such as John Ikenberry have noted that the "unipolar moment" would inevitably end while some realist such as Kenneth Waltz and Christopher Layne cautioned that "unipolarity" would rebound in creating opposition to America. They also agreed, however, that unipolarity would be temporary. Moving away from the balance of power theory and defensive realism, they argued that in international politics there is an "ironclad regulation" that grand power balance – on the inside and on the outside, or both – exist(s) in adjacent to would-be hegemons, including existing hegemon, the United States. However, as the events transpired, unipolarity continued into the 21st century and the United States maintained its post-Cold War hegemony (Layne 2009).

Unipolarity has two aspects (Layne 2009). One was the continuance of the U.S. military and economic power in the international system that would persist to all the other countries. On addition, it contains policy element, the preservation of America's pre-eminence in a unipolar system had become the superseding strategic aim of every American administration starting with that of President George H.W. Bush's administration (Layne 2009).

The Clinton administration declared that the United States was the “world’s greatest power” and promoted this objective through its national security strategy of “Engagement and Enlargement” (Clinton 2006). According to the George W. Bush administration, the plan of the American grand strategy was to put off every other power from “surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States” (The White House 2002). Significantly, the Obama administration also continuously promoted strengthening “America’s position of global leadership” (The White House 2015).

US debates on its hegemonic status was a major focus of two schools of thought in the U.S even as America stepped into the 21st century. They influenced the policy makers in Washington in developing the rebalance strategy. The dominant schools of thought which include realist, neorealist, the liberal international relations theorists and balance of threat realists contend that the pre-eminence enjoyed by the U.S. “at the end of the Cold War” continued well into the 21st century (Layne 2009).

Realists who promote “unipolar stability”, like Stephen Brook and William Wohlforth strongly expressed the view that American power capabilities would continue to exist insurmountably and that there was no evidence that countries banded together in anti-American alliance or tried to match the U.S. military capabilities on their own primarily because of advantage and benefits of security and economic gains (Brook and Wohlforth 2002; Ikenberry 2002). Others neorealists like John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt invoking “balance of threat” claimed that the absence of anti-American balancing highlight the accommodative policies adopted by the U.S. and institutional arrangements binding the United States and its allies together thereby allaying other’s fear of American dominance (Mastanduno 1997; Walt 2002).

John Ikenberry observed that the U.S. “commands the (global) commons” in that it alone has the extraordinary advantage in military power to project force in all regions of the world. “The situation will not change anytime soon, even with the rapid economic growth of countries such as China and India” (Ikenberry 2009).

The second school of thought asserted that the U.S. hegemony was challenged. American foreign policy experts perceived the rise of Asian powers as heralding the emergence of a

multi-polar world order. The U.S. government office of the Directors report, The National Intelligence Council's 2020 project *Mapping the Global Future* published in 2004. The report observed that "arrivist powers – China and India, perhaps other such as Brazil and Indonesia – have the potential to render" "obsolete the old categories of East and West, North and South. China and India are well position to become technology leaders" (National Intelligence Council 2004). Nevertheless, the National Intelligence Council (NIC) report affirmed that the U.S. is still in "a position to retain its overall leader although it must increasingly compete with Asia to retain its edge..." The NIC report projected that "by 2020 globalization could be equated with the popular mind with rising Asia, replacing its current association with Americanization" (National Intelligence Council 2004).

In 2008, the NIC published its report *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World*, observing the rise of China and India and that "by 2025 China would have become second largest economy" with first-rank military power. It noted that India sustained by its sturdy economic growth pace would "strive for a multipolar system with New Delhi as one of the poles" (National Intelligence Council 2008). The report also highlighted that the American-led unipolar world would surrender to multi-polarity at some point in the following two decades. According to the NIC, added to America's relative decline, the super power would continue to confront other restraint on its global role. The report indicated that there were signs of weakening of the U.S. soft power relating to liberal model of political aspects especially democracy and economic development in terms of financial and development assistance which would be challenged by authoritarian/statist alternative together with challenging economic assistance (with no strings attached by the Chinese) (National Intelligence Council 2008).

Global Trends 2025 was brought out ahead of the full scope of the international financial and economic crisis experience. The NIC report did not overlook the meltdown's potential impact on the U.S. economic power for it predicted that dollar's function as the global economy's preminent reserve currency would erode. China's move in the spring of 2009 to swap the dollar with a fresh reserve currency was the type of warning the NIC predicted (National Intelligence Council 2008).

The document *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds* elucidated that by the year 2030, Asia would have “outdone North America and Europe merged in terms of population size, global power based on GDP, technological investment and military spending” (National Intelligence Council 2012).

The NIC also pointed out that China would alone almost certainly have the leading economy exceeding that of the U.S. a few years ahead of 2030. Furthermore, China, Brazil and India would become major regional powers. The report observed that although “the United States relative decline vis-à-vis the rising states was inevitable, degree and continuance of its future role as dominant power in the international system” could vary widely. Nevertheless, the report affirmed that America would stay “first among equals” amid “other great powers in 2030” as it would remain a pre-eminent power “across a range of power dimensions” (both hard and soft power) backed by the history of its leadership position. The NIC also observed “with the rapid rise of other countries, the unipolar moment was over and pax-Americana” was winding down fast. Yet, the NIC predicted “the replacement of the United States by another global power and erection of new international order seemed at least unlikely by 2030”. Additionally, the NIC affirmed that replacing the U.S. was unlikely as the emerging powers did not espouse any competing vision and all they were “eager to take their place at the top table of key international institutions, such as the UN, IMF and the World Bank” (National Intelligence Council 2012).

In addition, the NIC’s significant observation was “emerging powers were not a bloc; they did not have any unitary alternative vision. Their perspectives – even China’s – were more keyed to shaping regional structures” (National Intelligence Council 2012).

The discussion on the unipolar world to multipolarity, decline of the U.S. and rise of China and India, led foreign policy scholars to explain the power transition taking place in contemporary Asia where the leading actors are the U.S. and China, while not ignoring Japan, South Korea, ASEAN countries and India that are closely involved (Horimoto 2014).

In the power transition process, the U.S. and Japan are perceived as defenders of the status quo and China as the revisionist power (Xiao 2015). The Power transition theory was first introduced by AFK Organski (1958) in the book titled, *World Politics*. The outbreak of war between the great powers were explained by the power transition theorists as directly linked to power transition when the challenger perceives having reached power parity with the status quo power (Organski 1958).

Differing from Organski school of power transition, Paul Kennedy (1987), a British historian at Yale University, in his book, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers*, argued that expanded economic and military interest of great powers lead to their ultimate decline by a phenomena “imperial outstretch”, which paves the way for the rise of “new great powers which one day would have a decisive impact on the military/territorial order” (Kennedy 1987). The leadership in Beijing understood the link between economic strength and geopolitical weight. They would have certainly calculated that should China continue to sustain near-double digit growth rates in the early decades of this century, it would surpass the United States as the world’s largest economy. Studies by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and other governmental reports projected that China would be a first rate military power and would rival America in global power by 2020 (Layne 2008).

In the book edited by Ronald L. Tammen (2000) entitled, *Power Transitions: Strategies for the 21st Century*, the Organski thesis is reasserted which emphasized power parity and dissatisfaction with the status-quo, challenger would at the risk of war revise or alter the international system (Organski 1958; Kennedy 1987; Tammen 2000).

Asia’s Rising Powers and the U.S. Asia-Pacific Strategy

As China’s rise is debated and looked at from various perspectives, one of the theories is based on hegemonic stability theories (Beitelman 2012), which is a subset of realism. The United States, China, Japan and the other rising powers of the Asia-Pacific region are important players in international politics currently; China being one of the most attention-grabbing actors on the regional and world stage. The world is watching their moves and the resultant actions have repercussions for the world where it is headed. At

present, in the international sphere, China is far and wide seen as America's main competitor in striving for global influence. With the talks about the rise of China, playing as a threat to the American dominance in world politics, some analysts were of the view that the global order would rupture if U.S. power declines (Beattie 2011).

A number of policy makers argue that the rise of China's power and the rest pose a big threat to both the foreign policy of the United States and the systemic stability. The realists are of the opinion that if the decline of the United States is an actual phenomenon, the states might get into confrontational conflict(s) in orders to take over as the global leader (Beitelman 2012).

With respect to China's growth, ensuing rise in power and its strategic moves, both suspicion and vigilance have been on the rise in the United States. However, the *China Daily* opined that little importance is given to cautiously assessing Chinese policies and actions; while much attention is directed towards describing foreign policies of China as aggressive, assertive and arrogant. China's policies should be looked at from the perspective of its actions rather than its rhetoric. According to the *China Daily*, government of China has made several tough official statements saying that the South China Sea is a core Chinese interest (Wei 2010). In fact, when it comes to real action, since 1988 there has been no documentation of any incidence when China has used force in such cases of conflict or dispute in dealing with its ASEAN neighbours occupying islands claimed by China in the South China Sea. Beijing has always seemed to be confused and undecided on the issue. China, according to this view, is more wronged than otherwise (Wang 2011).

The after effects of the Great Recession of the 21st century in 2008 saw a change in world politics and America's unipolarity appear to be threatened. The 2008 recession had some significant impact on the global order (Morgan 2011). Even so, as much as the 2008 recession is important to the rise of China, Paul Kennedy, already predicted about China's ascent in global politics during the late 80s. Kennedy was of the view that empires came to power and went out of power as a consequence of their capability to keep up with economic and technological change to attain relative prosperity and

dynamism. Great Powers became and remained in power being great if they continued to produce more than their contenders by innovating more, arranging themselves better and balancing consumption and investment. These once powerful countries declined if they were unsuccessful in these tasks or if their contenders were more successful. Kennedy argued that even if the United States had accumulated unparalleled war-making potent, its economic headship which makes a vital base for its military supremacy, was being slowly worn. The book talks about three other “power units” such as China, Japan and the European Community were achieving rapid economic strength in a relative manner, and all three posed challenges for America’s unipolar supremacy (Kennedy 1987).

China has been a “candidate super-power” in its own right. Some of the vital features that proved well for the future were its enormous population with 1.3 billion people, quickly growing Gross Domestic Product, remarkable achievements in military technology, stable (even though oppressive) government and readiness to oppose decisions of the superpowers. China has had the Great Power approach or the Middle Kingdom mentality for a long time. ‘Time’ turned out to be the only matter before China’s ever rising size and political will which started posing geopolitical trouble for the rest of the world. China occupies the position of being the second-largest economy in the world, and the country is also the world’s largest exporter of merchandise. Like any powerful country, China has its voracious demand for resources which is affecting it to develop its influence in the Pacific, in Africa and West Asia. It has vast U.S. dollars in reserve which is essentially needed to use or potentially lose as the dollar wear away in value. China is certainly racing towards the goal of converting its economic clout into greater military supremacy, along with its financial reserves that are getting changed from T-bonds into other investments (*The China Daily* 2004).

However, arguments that posited China as America’s competitor have also been criticized. For instance, U.S. – China competition cannot be compared to the preceding power struggles between the former powerful countries given the power disparity that exists between the United States and China. In earlier times, Britain and Germany were equivalent in strength and they at least had the minimum criteria to challenge each other for political pre-eminence and have power over the seas. Also, Germany confronted

Britain militarily, and not by procuring large amounts of Britain's debts, like China has done with the United States. Chinese officials have said that neither does the country have enough potential to face up to the challenges posed by the United States nor does it intend to confront the U.S. in the future. Hegemonic stability theorists believe that the stability of a system is decided chiefly by its ability to bend to the requirements of the dominant actors within it. Also the system itself limits the behaviour of states or the wants of the states (Beitelman 2012).

According to this view, the structure of a system can have deep influences on the cost of implementing power and shifting the system. While creating alliances or counterbalancing power, the number of states, and distribution of capabilities among the states are important factors. An example can be cited which explains that it is simpler for the United States to create alliances when compared to China's ability to do the same. This is because of the preponderance of the United States when it comes to holding systemic power. Also, the relative increase in a rising state's power would eventually result in efforts to alter the rules running the international relations, the distribution of the areas of influence, as well as the division of territory. For example, the current scenario has shown how influential China has become (Beitelman 2012).

Apart from accommodating rising powers, especially China to play responsible role in global arena, there also emerged two schools of thought in the U.S. with regards to ways in which the U.S. ought to conduct relations with it. A set of scholars representing the realist school of thought led by Huntington, Richard Bernstein, Ross Munro, Mearsheimer provided the "China threat" perspective by arguing military and economic power of China would weaken the U.S.' hold over Asia and the world. They argued that rising China would be dissatisfied with the existing system and urged the U.S. to embark on a "containment policy" (Huntington 1997; Bernstein and Munro 1998; Mearsheimer 2001; Mearsheimer 2006). These scholars warned, especially Mearsheimer, saying "China should be constrained before its military and economic power became an overwhelming challenge to the U.S. hegemony or strategic primacy" in Asia, and that preventive measures, rather than engagement or appeasement, were necessary. Noted neorealist scholar Christopher Layne observed that the U.S. containment strategy would

rely “mostly on the traditional hard power tools of military might and alliance diplomacy to thwart China’s great power emergence” (Layne 2008). He pointed out stating:

“To contain China, the United States would maintain both its nuclear and conventional military superiority over China, and would develop a credible first strike option based on a combination of robust offensive nuclear capabilities and effective ballistic missile defenses. Advocates of containment hope that various measures encompassed by this strategy could halt China’s rise and preserve American dominance in East Asia” (Layne 2008: 15).

Chinese perspective, interestingly, has argued that by means of the narrative of China's rise and the 'China threat' theory, it was in the interest of the U.S. to sway China's neighbours into believing that the Asia-Pacific region requires Washington's presence and security so as to ‘amalgamate’ them in order to create a 'strategic rebalance' in opposition to China’s rising power in the region. In their view, the Chinese government was sure that such a strategy against it by the U.S. was bound to lose as its growth would be unavoidable and inescapable. Further, this view also stressed that China’s neighbours would in due course plump for stronger ties with it while slowly excluding the Americans. This perspective also made it clear that China scrutinizes its economic ascendancy as something that is not mixed with other necessary good. As China continues building up and testing out its aircraft carriers, stealth jets, cyber capabilities and high-tech missiles, such activities show an all the time more well-built position to refute U.S. access to its shores and several key Pacific sea lanes, which might pose a predicament if Obama's rebalance policy ever turns out to be a ‘shove’ from ‘push’ (Xinbo 2012).

Other Chinese views also agreed that the aim of American strategy was to split up China in terms of its territory, politically destabilize it, restrain it strategically and upset it in economical sphere (Shambaugh 1995).

The conspiracy theorists believed that the United States is decisively creating a “crescent encirclement” around China (*The Global Times* 2010) by means of its use of military bases, deployment of anti-missile systems, military exercises, and alliances. The Chinese officials also deemed that Washington has been in the process of forming an “Asia NATO” by using its various relations with the Asian countries such as Japan, South

Korean, Australia, and India including some of the members of ASEAN (*The Global Times* 2010).

On the question of China's rise, Rong Chen believes that rebalancing policy is one such good example illustrating a case of classical realist security dilemma. The four tenets of realism such as states existing in anarchy and constant conflict; states being the only relevant actors dominating and shaping international and regional politics; states as rational actors; and the primary objective of the state which is survival leading to security dilemma. Chen was of the view that this fitted well in the context of the Asia-Pacific with Obama administration redirecting the rebalance policy toward the region with the motive to shape strategic power relations between countries. He also showed a situation where instability could be brought about in the region from competition in building military strength and thus, rendering a zero-sum game in the security scenario of the region (Chen 2013).

Realists in the U.S such as Stephen Walt believed in strategic balancing to avoid latent conflicts between the United States and China and, at the same time, to pursue peaceful cooperation and coexistence. Walt also compared the present position of China in this power politics to the United States in the nineteenth century. If China had been striving ahead to acquire more resources for growth in economic, military and energy, it would by design use its power to enlarge its sphere of influence as the rising country highly depends on importing raw materials and since, its economy is driven mostly by its exports growth. Therefore, China would do almost anything to secure the routes to get access to resources and markets for the country's growth in this great power struggle in the Asia-Pacific, even if it means challenging the United States. On this premise, Walt talks about the possible security competition between the United States and China, including whichever country in the region sides with either of the two powers (Chen 2013).

Thus, hegemony and challenges to existing power structures would depend on the state's (China) readiness to implement its power to such an end and not just on the state's (China) ability to influence such change. Based on this assumption, China's main aim is to guard its interest in securing resources and trade routes in the region, and expand its influence, at the most (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2011).

Several foreign policy scholars have written about the policy alternatives of engagement including accommodation and containment as ways in which the U.S. could ensure that rising powers like China conforms and accepts the status quo and thereby prevent war. Zhiquan Zhu in his book, *US-China Relations in the 21st Century: Power Transition and Peace*, argued that weaving China into the international community by incorporating it into existing international regimes and organizations during its rise where it benefits from abiding by international norms would help create U.S.-China ties (Zhiquan 2010). Zhu also pointed out that incorporating China into the multilateral international arena where China's own interest hinged on abiding by international rule would ensure that China becomes a satisfied power. In *The Post-American World*, Fareed Zakaria mentioned that the U.S. could maintain rebalance of international politics by assuaging the need of rising powers by recognizing their status and engaging in consultation, cooperation and compromise with them (Zakaria 2009).

When the debate on growing threat from China gained momentum in the U.S., China released its peaceful rise doctrine (Bijian 2005). Realist John Mearsheimer observed that "to put it bluntly: China cannot rise peacefully" (Mearsheimer 2010). He pointed out that Beijing's actions alone would result in compelling the security rivalry in the region in the future. Moreover, Washington seemed to also behave in belligerent ways, consequently, escalating the projections for potential difficulties in the Asia-Pacific region. Neorealist Christopher Layne pointed out that "peaceful rise" – Beijing claims – "is doubtful". He pointed out that throughout history, whenever new poles of power come out in the international system, destabilizing effects have been witnessed. There is no reason to believe that China's rise would be an exception (Layne 2008).

Zhang Bijian, Chairman of China Reform Forum at the Boao Forum for Asia, clarified that “China’s peaceful rise” meant the developmental path that China had been pursuing “dating back to the third plenary of the 11th National Congress of the Communist Party of China at the end of 1978 and lasting until the middle of the 21st century” (Bijian 2005).

Zhang Bijian also said that China has always wanted to achieve modernization by means of “sustained, rapid, coordinated and sound development on the basis of reform and opening up”. He also highlighted that China learnt that “peace” and “rise” could be integrated and it was not necessary that they be taken as contradictory. He also explained that it was possible as China combined “building socialism with Chinese characteristics independently” and “engaging in economic globalization” rather than staying away from it. “Building socialism with Chinese characteristics independently” would mean, “while attaching importance to utilizing the world market and the resources it provides, we mainly depend on our own strength for settlement of the problems arising in the process of development, rather than bring trouble to other countries”. He also said that in the process of pursuing “peaceful rise”, China developed a new security concept that is comprehensive and strategic in nature. It advocates “peaceful existence as its precondition, common interests as its basis, strategic cooperation as its bond and common development as its objective” (Bijian 2005).

The People’s Daily, a Chinese media outlet of the Chinese Communist Party, stated that China was able to tap into the benefits produced by economic globalization to advance itself further through “peaceful means”. It went on to say that the Chinese leadership neither intended to “challenge the existing international order” nor use force to disrupt the system. The international economic globalization has given the China the opportunity to move towards a peaceful growth and modernization. It also affirmed that if the Chinese government wanted to bring about a change in the existing system by introducing “new political and economic order”, the leadership would push for “reform through peaceful means” (*The People’s Daily* 2005).

On 22 December 2005, the State Council Information Office of China released *China's Peaceful Development Road, a white paper* consisting five chapters. The chapters included:

“Peaceful Development Is the Inevitable Way for China's Modernization; Promoting World Peace and Development with China's Own Growth; Developing by Relying on Its Own Strength, Reform and Innovation; Seeking Mutual Benefit and Common Development with Other Countries; and Building a Harmonious World of Sustained Peace and Common Prosperity” (State Council Information Office 2005).

The document also highlighted that the road of peaceful development was going to be a long one that was in harmony with “the fundamental interests of the Chinese people”. It also stated that the Chinese government and its people’s determination to move on the path that led to peaceful development were unwavering (State Council Information Office 2005).

At the first East Asia Summit held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 14 November 2005, Premier Wen Jiabao gave a speech titled "To Realize Mutual Benefits and Create a Win-Win Situation through Opening up and Inclusion". He spoke about China's progress which came through the reforms and opening up, and reinforced the Chinese government’s commitment to pursuing “a peaceful development path”. He also laid emphasis on Beijing’s stand to be "a good neighbor and partner" by following the guiding principle of "fostering an amicable, peaceful and prosperous neighborhood". He also said that China was “committed to developing friendly cooperative relations with other countries in the region” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2005).

The concept of “peaceful development” was developed as a negation to the rising “China threat perception”. *The People’s Daily* reported that over the past few decades, China has witnessed a fast-paced economic growth along with an increasingly aggressive national strength. In this light, the developed countries have been threatened wherein they have grown to be “suspicious and cautious” of China. All these contributed to the "China threat" theory. However, the media mouthpiece of the Chinese government stated that the

world is starting to recognize Beijing's "sincerity and practices of commitment to peaceful development" and that due to China's diplomatic efforts, "foreign hostility" against it was disappearing slowly. It went on to confirm that as China works on to promote the peaceful rise theory, through its contribution and cooperation in regional and international matters, the "China threat" concept would fade away (*The People's Daily* 2006).

"Annual Report to Congress: Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2006", the U.S. Department of Defense articulated the changing nature of China's rise and increasing military might. It stated that Washington welcome "the rise of a peaceful and prosperous China". However, it drew attention to the tasks that lied ahead for Chinese leaders as China's power and influence developed. The document emphasized that the leaders had to make wise decisions on many issues ranging from "challenges of China's economic transition and political reform, rising nationalism, internal unrest, proliferation of dangerous technologies, adoption of international norms, and China's expanding military power" (Department of Defense 2006).

It also underlined that fact that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) was:

"...in the process of long-term transformation from a mass army designed for protracted wars of attrition on its territory to a more modern force capable of fighting short duration, high intensity conflicts against high-tech adversaries... The PLA's transformation features new doctrine for modern warfare, reform of military institutions and personnel systems, improved exercise and training standards, and the acquisition of advanced foreign (especially Russian) and domestic weapon systems. China's leaders have yet to adequately explain the purposes or desired end-states of their military expansion" (Department of Defense 2006: I).

The Department Defense document also highlighted that when China published the White Paper titled *China's Peaceful Development Road* in December 2005 to dispel increasing regional suspicion and concerns over China's rise and military expansion, there was not enough explanation. In the document, "China's military expansion – which

provides an important context for understanding China's development – was not addressed” (Department of Defense 2006).

China celebrated the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in September 2011 and released its White Paper on Peaceful Development, after the 2005 document. On this occasion, Beijing seized the opportunity to reiterate its goals of pursuing “peaceful development” as a “strategic choice made by China to realize modernization, make itself strong and prosperous, and make more contribution to the progress of human civilization”. It also emphasized that China intended to “follow the path of peaceful development” without wavering. As mentioned before, China believed that the path of peaceful development was constituted by factors such as “scientific, independent, open, peaceful, cooperative and common development”. The Chinese leadership also confirmed that it was hopeful of the future both at the regional and international level. It also represented five principles that would be adopted and reflected in its international relations thinking and foreign policies direction. These principles would lead to achieving peaceful development (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2011, 7 September). They were as follows:

“Promoting the building of a harmonious world; pursuing an independent foreign policy of peace; promoting new thinking on security featuring mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and coordination; actively living up to international responsibility; and promoting regional cooperation and good-neighbourly relations” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2011, 7 September).

American foreign policy scholar John Ikenberry observed that “rise of China does not have to trigger a wrenching hegemonic transition (Ikenberry 2008).” He pointed out saying:

“The U.S.-Chinese power transition can be very different from those of the past because China faces international order that is fundamentally different from those that past rising states confronted. China does not just face the United States, it faces a western centered system that is open integrated, and rule based, with wide and deep political foundations. The nuclear revolution, meanwhile, has made war among great powers unlikely...” (Ikenberry 2008).

Ikenberry affirmed that “today’s western order, in short, is hard to overturn and easy to join.” According to him, today, China “can gain full access to and thrive within this system. If it does, China will rise but the western order – if managed properly – will live on.” He confidently suggested as liberalist that the U.S. grand strategy must be constructed more or less in sync with the motto “The road to the East runs through the West”. He argued that this order should be deeply entrenched so that China would be given larger encouragement for integration rather than resistance and thus, enhancing the chance so that this system would continue to exist even after the relative power decline of the U.S (Ikenberry 2008).

Along with Ikenberry, other American liberal scholars such as David Lampton, Christopher Findlay, Andrew Watson, S.G. Goodman and Gerald Segal presented the argument that the U.S. should incorporate China into the world system through engagement (Lampton 2003; Findlay and Watson 1997; Johnston and Ross 1999). Engagement assumed:

“As China’s contact with the outside world multiply, its exposure to the Western (mostly American) political and cultural values will result in evolutionary political change within China. The proponents of engagement believe that the forces of domestic political liberalization and economic globalization will temper Beijing’s foreign policy ambitions and lead to a peaceful Sino-American relationship. On the economic side, the logic of engagement is that, as China becomes increasingly tied to the international economy, its interdependence with others will constrain it from taking political actions that could disrupt its vital access both to foreign markets and capital and to high-technology imports from the United States, Japan and Western Europe” (Layne 2009: 150).

Proponents of engagement have also argued that the United States should facilitate Chinese integration into the international economy and to embed the country “in the complex web of international institutional arrangement”. A Beijing engaged in such a manner would show much interest in cooperation and this intention would not be inclined towards pursuing any sort of competition with the U.S. or with its neighbors in Asia (Layne 2009).

The U.S. policy, global order and international system prognosis, on the whole, have been that while the U.S. hegemony will endure, unipolarity will not last indefinitely. All

the three U.S. National Intelligence Council reports observed that “arrivist powers” – China and India – have the potential to render “obsolete the categories of East and West, North and South”. China and India are well positioned to become technology leaders and especially since 2006, China’s annual growth rate had been nearly double-digit, with foreign trade surpassing the U.S. and foreign exchange reserve accounting 70% of U.S. treasury securities. The astonishing economic growth was observed as shaking the world both economically and geopolitically and with the U.S. Central Intelligence projecting that China would become the first-rate military power and America’s rival in global power by 2020 (National Intelligence Council 2004; National Intelligence Council 2008; National Intelligence Council 2012). Besides, Washington saw China’s increasing political and military might as a challenge that might threaten stability and compete with the US in the Asia-Pacific region (Department of Defense 2006).

Based on these trends, scholars have pronounced power transition taking place in contemporary Asia where the leading actors are the U.S. and China, while Japan, South Korea and ASEAN countries and India are closely involved. As the discourses on the U.S. policy and global order have maintained that current post-Cold War international system is unipolar and the U.S. hegemony exist, a major research article in *International Security Journal* by Nuno P. Monteiro claimed that unipolar system is not peaceful although a sizable literature on the topic has been that unipolar system is durable and peaceful (Monteiro 2011).

Monteiro pointed out that in the first two decades of the unipolar era, international politics have been anything but peaceful. The U.S. forces have been deployed in four interstate wars: Kuwait in 1991, Kosovo in 1999, Afghanistan from 2001 to the present, and Iraq between 2003 and 2010. In all of these conflicts, the U.S. has been at war for thirteen of the two and a half decade since the end of the Cold War. He affirmed that polarity creates significant conflict producing mechanisms. The type of conflict that occurs depends on the strategy of the sole great power which is the United States. The first two – defensive and offensive dominance – would lead to conflict pitting the sole great power against other states. The third – disengagement – will lead to conflict among other states. The unipole could pursue one of the three strategies to attain global status

quo which is based on three components: territorial arrangements, international political alignment, and the global distribution of power (Monteiro 2011).

“Using an offensive-dominance strategy, the unipole seek to revise at least one of the status quo components in its favour. With a strategy of defensive-dominance, it tries to maintain all three components. In a strategy of disengagement, it pays no attention to the maintenance of the international status quo, allowing others to change it in their favour” (Monteiro 2011: 14).

According to Monteiro, between 1991 and 2001:

“The United States implemented a strategy of defensive dominance everywhere except in Africa, from where it largely disengaged after withdrawing from Somalia in 1994. Between late 2001 and 2005, when the Bush doctrine was in full force, the United States shifted to an offensive-dominance strategy in the Middle East, toppling regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq, while maintaining its defensive-dominance in Europe and East Asia and remaining largely disengaged from Africa” (Monteiro 2011: 22).

Christopher Layne observed that two policy alternatives were suggested to the United States for responding to Asian scene especially to China’s emergence as a great power (Layne 2008). These were: engagement (accommodation) and containment (constraining or hedging). In reality, formulation and practice of the U.S. foreign policy had been a combination of engagement and containment which Monteiro noted as defensive and offensive dominance strategy in Asia. Strategically, the goal of post-Cold War U.S. strategy has been to prevent the emergence of new power (or as the Pentagon called them “peer competitors”). Much more clarity of the U.S. policy was provided by the Bush administration in its 2002 and 2006 National Security Strategy reports of the United States and the 2006 Quadrennial Defence Review. These reports promised that the U.S. would act to prevent any other state from building up military capabilities in the hope of “surpassing or even equaling the power of the United States.” They also pointed out that the U.S. promoted sustained engagement which would include “maintaining robust partnership supported by a forward defence posture supporting economic integration through expanded trade and investment and promoting democracy and human rights”. The Defence Review asserted that the United States would “seek to ensure that no foreign power can dictate the terms of regional and global security order” (Vaughn 2007).

National interest, however, is described as projecting both hard power and the endorsement of the ideals the U.S. supports. The National Security Strategy put it in this way that America's grand strategy is "based on a distinctly American internationalism that reflects the union of our values and our national interest". Several analysts have identified this modus operandi as "liberal realism", "national security liberalism", otherwise, the same as neoconservative Charles Krauthammer calls it "democratic realism". This kind of liberalism is further powerfully built as well as offensive than idealism. The widening of democracy and economic openness are ingrained in American premeditated thinking for the reason that policy makers consider the U.S. power, security and authority are improved in a world consisting of "free market democracies" (Layne 2008).

The above spelled out aspects of the post-Cold War strategy of the U.S. was theoretically presented by Joseph Nye, the world-renowned soft power theorist, as smart power. The term smart power had originated from the works of Joseph Nye, Suzanne Nossel and Richard L. Armitage. The details of the approach of smart power were provided by Joseph Nye in his book *The Future of Power*. Nye said that smart power is neither hard power nor soft power but, it is a skilful combination of both. Nye went on to assert his opinion stating that he characterized power to have the ability to affect others in order to achieve the objectives the subject aims to attain. Nye suggested three ways in which the subject achieves its aims: firstly, by using coercion (that is sticks); secondly, through the utilization of payments (carrots); thirdly, one can opt to employ attraction and persuasion which is known as 'soft power'. The ability to wield the combination of these powers (smart power) would bestow the state (whether is it the United States or any other state or international entity) with the ability to fight the challenges in this era (Nye Jr. 2011).

Nye also elaborates on how the international system is witnessing change due to the dynamics in power play. These changes have come about due to the ever increasing invasion by throng of information revolution and globalization. These big shifts have been diagnosed as power diffusion which takes place between states and non-state actors and power transition occurs between and among states. Nye's answers to the United

States' rebalance policy towards Asia-Pacific and China, in particular, is explained below (Nye Jr. 2011).

In history, before the European Industrial revolution, Asia was an economic storehouse containing half the world's economy and booming with half the world's population. However, with the arrival of industrial revolution, production in Europe took over Asia's production speed, with decline in production to 20 percent. Nonetheless, by the turn of the century, Asia's economy and population rapidly accelerated. It is expected that Asia would possibly supersede in embodying half the world's economy and population. In light of the recent trends, which are seemingly good for Asia, adversely, might foment trepidation leading to threatening the United States. Thus, he stressed on what rebalancing policy aimed to do:

“the importance of maintaining old alliances and creating new power networks incorporating rising powers on the understanding that current American predominance does not equate to hegemony... potential challenge of the rise of the hostile hegemon in Asia, that is, China... welcome China as a responsible stake holder but hedging possible hostility by maintaining close relations with Japan, India and other countries in Asia that welcomed American presence [in Asia]” (Nye Jr. 2011).

Suzanne Nossel, an American scholar, who coined the phrase “smart power” together with Joseph Nye, elucidates that smart power is what the progressives must focus on in this twentieth first century if the United States want to recover its credibility and maintain its status as the most powerful state in the world. She talks about how the conservatives have utterly failed in its foreign policy strategies during Bush's administration and thereby, posing a opportune moment for the progressives to come up with a compelling vision by presenting a strong American foreign policy inspired by liberal internationalism. She brings in other examples where under various administrations liberal international had succeeded, for example, Harry Truman utilized a liberal internationalism to create a global free trade system and reconstruct Japan and Europe, etc; and also fell short in instances such as Kennedy's administration policies in the

Vietnam crisis, etc; and cases like Kosovo, Rwanda and Bosnia where the usage of the doctrine was criticised as naive idealism (Nossel 2004).

Suzanne also highlighted, in her article “smart power” that under the Bush administration, ideals such as freedom and liberation became linked to violence and unwanted occupation. She then continues to suggest that liberal internationalism has the inevitable pressing task to end the ugly process of tarnishing American-leadership image globally, and restore confidence in the U.S. supremacy to remain a super power of a more peaceful and stable global system. It becomes a critical prerogative of the American administration to fight issues such as terrorism and nuclear proliferation through the employment of liberal internationalism. When Suzanne published the article in 2004, she already saw what the Bush administration was doing, leading to overstretching financial and military campaigns in the name of protecting democracy, human rights and freedom after the 9/11 attacks. She went on to suggest that the best practical American foreign policy would be to bolster the time-honoured tools of liberal internationalist¹ statecraft (Nossel 2004).

Then Deputy *Secretary* of State Richard Armitage and Joseph Nye, in their report “CSIS Commission on Smart Power: A smarter, more secure America” suggested that America should wield smart power by giving importance to pursuing global good which is to help other countries attain what they want (liberal objectives) but could not achieve without global American leadership and power. In the already existing conventional foreign policy framework where military and economic power is given weight, the report talks about giving soft power a larger role; thereby, creating a framework equipped to handle challenging global issues. The report identifies five crucial areas to work on, such as global development, public diplomacy, alliances, partnerships, institutions, economic integration and technological innovation. Development and cooperation in these important areas with other peoples and governments of the world would certainly allow the United States to intensify its pursuit of global good through smart power. By building

¹ Liberal Internationalism represents a foreign policy of the liberal states enshrining the ideas of self-determination and sovereignty in other states even through interventions (both by means of military and humanitarian aid) while pursuing liberal objectives.

relations through these means with other countries, the American government would strengthen its pre-eminence as a legit global leader the world accepts (Armitage and Nye 2007). Then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton declared “smart power” in the first blueprint Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (2009), and executed modus operandi to American foreign policy with the help of few other important policy makers in the white house under the Obama administration. Clinton envisioned the policy to push American engagement in the Asia and Pacific region shifting away from just pursuing foreign policy through unilateralism and the cliché “boots on the ground”. She went on to describe “smart power” as a amalgamation of tools and policies including political, diplomatic, economic, cultural, legal and military alliance as a resort after everything else. The above mentioned elements could be combined to use depending on the situation to be tackled in any given circumstances. This strategic policy was formed to support America as it geared up to fight the traditional and new challenges the 21st century has ushered into the highly sophisticated present world (Correct the Record 2014). Then Primary Foreign Affairs and Defense Policy Advisor Andrew J. Shapiro also explicated that cooperation between the important United States federal executive departments, such as Department of State, Department of Defense, and industry, was indispensable to stand against the challenges faced by the United Sates and the world (Shapiro 2009).

Furthermore, rebalancing as a geo-political strategic policy looks at substantial changes in many areas politically, militarily, culturally, diplomatically, economically, technologically, etc. There is so much debate about which one area would take precedence in being the vanguard of this policy drive in the Asia and Pacific region. Smart power theory of statecraft seemed to have influenced the making of the rebalance policy towards the Asia-Pacific (U.S. Congressional Hearing, A Majority Staff Report 2014).

Declaration and Decision of the Rebalance Policy to the Asia-Pacific Region

Three major landmark developments made the incoming Obama administration announce its major policy in geostrategic term, “pivot to Asia” or “rebalance” toward the Asia-Pacific region (Donilon 2011). The first game changer was the U.S. financial crisis of

2008 which affected not only American domestic economy but global economic profile especially in Asia. Further, the implication was of China benefitting in the region by improving its economic weight and increasing its interaction with regional Asian states in trade and investment thereby reducing relevance of America in Asia (CRS 2009; Sutter et.al., 2013). The potential political and economic implication of China's large and growing holding of the U.S. government debt securities (by the end of 2016, China's holding of 1.058 trillion dollar in U.S. Treasuries, following Japan as the second-leading foreign holder of U.S. Treasuries) was a concern for the US (U.S. – China Economic and Security Review Commission 2017).

During her first visit to China in February 2009, then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton urged China to continue to buy U.S. treasury securities and avoid redeeming the existing securities but received no positive response (Department of State 2009, 21 February). However, the Chinese intention to weaken the American economy became visible in the build-up to the G-20 meeting in London in April 2009, the Chinese People Central Bank Governor suggested the new international Reserve Currency to replace the dollar. Yet, the U.S. president took a number of initiatives to engage China and improve U.S.-China relations. In April 2009, the Obama administration announced the creation of the Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S&ED) between China and the U.S (Department of the Treasury 2009).

In July 2009, the S&ED dialogue was held in Washington but with no progress. Amidst the growing disappointment with China, then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at the ASEAN Summit in Bangkok on 21 July 2009 declared alternative policy of engagement with and in the entire region by affirming that the Obama administration “will demonstrate that America is back”. It seemed like President Obama still proceeded with the policy option promoted by then Deputy Secretary of State James Steingberg and in November 2009 took his first trip to China that aimed to establish closer ties with Beijing. The results were mixed and somewhat disappointing for the Obama administration and American media described the trip as “less than epochal” (Consulate General of the People's Republic of China in San Francisco 2009; Johnson 2009).

Reports of the Presidential visit in the US media stressed the aspect of failure rather than gains. For instance, the Chinese refusal to revalue its currency, trade dispute on Chinese steel imports, restricting market for the U.S. automobiles in China, the U.S. nylon fibre import by China, and in foreign policy question of “sovereign & territorial integrity” and “core rights” upheld by China in the South China Sea dispute, differences on China’s human rights violation that continued, Washington and Beijing’s differences at the Copenhagen summit on climate change that persisted, and last but not the least, criticizing the U.S. proposed military sale to Taiwan and strongly opposing American military exercise in the Yellow sea. President Obama before visiting China went to Japan in November 2009 wherein he declared that “as America’s first-Pacific president”, he would promise that this “Pacific nation will strengthen and sustain our leadership in this vitally important part of the world” (Obama 2009, 14 November).

Yet, in the U.S.-China Joint Statement, especially the Chinese version had a different formulation: “China welcomes the efforts of the United States as an Asia-Pacific nation to contribute to peace, stability and prosperity in the region”. Whereas the English version of the joint statement was “China welcome the United States as an Asia-Pacific nation... (The White House 2011, 19 January; Glaser 2010)” There was a vast difference between the two statements as it gave an impression of Chinese as not prepared to accept the U.S. as an Asia-Pacific nation.

Thus, the stage was set for President Obama to consider diluting the entire focus on China for greater emphasis on other Asia-Pacific nations later in his term. Outcome of such as posture was the declaration of the new strategic posture of “pivot to Asia” which then Assistant Secretary of State Campbell pointed out was to counter China’s view in 2008 and 2009 that an arrogant United States had been knocked down by the recession and “there’s new Sheriff in town and its China”. Therefore, the Obama administration through the “pivot to Asia” policy conveyed the message to Asian states, “In order to advance the Administration’s pivot to East Asia and the Pacific, the U.S. government will maintain presence in the region as a preeminent trade and investment partner, security guarantor, and example of democracy and good governance” (U.S. Congressional Hearing, A Majority Staff Report 2014).

Explaining on the U.S. pivot to Asia, then U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton asserted that the “heart of the strategy” was “our support for democracy and human rights”. She explained that democracy and human rights were not only America’s “most cherished values” but they were “the birthright of every person born in the world” and that all those were “the values that speak to the dignity of every human being”. Focusing on the similar liberal language on 15 April 2013, the new U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry in his first trip to Japan in Asia said, “We must use our Pacific partnership to build a region whose people can enjoy the full benefits of democracy, the rule of law, universal human rights including the freedom of expression, freedom of association, and peaceful assembly, freedom of religion, conscience and belief.” (Department of State 2013; Chen 2013)

In addition to this public diplomacy, two other major strands of the Obama administration’s Asia-Pacific diplomacy activism which were significant element of the rebalancing effort included: (a) deepening of engagement with the Asia-Pacific multilateral institutions while managing the U.S.-China relations, (b) increased American focus on economic and trade relations with increased foreign assistance to the Asia-Pacific region (CRS 2012).

The second game changer was the perception that after the successful completion of the 2008 Beijing Olympic games, China gained more confidence and proceeded with assertive action in the South China Sea as in the East China sea and even in the Sea of Japan (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Negara Brunei Darussalam 2009).

In October 2008, four warships including two *Sovremenny*-class destroyers imported through Russia passed through Tsugaru Strait. This was the first time Chinese warships passed through Tsugaru. In the next month, four warships including a *Luzhou*-class destroyer passed through Miyako strait. In December 2008, two Chinese State Oceanic administration ships invaded Japanese territorial waters surrounding the Senkaku islands for about ten hours. In March 2009, the *USNS Impeccable* was harassed in the South China Sea. The *USNS Victorious* was also harassed in the East China Sea two months later. In June 2009, five People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) including *Lazhou*-class destroyer, deployed in the North of Okinotorishima in Japan. In December 2009,

Vietnamese were arrested by a PLAN ship. In March 2010, six PLAN ships including *Luzhou*-class destroyers were deployed in the Pacific. In April 2010, ten PLAN warships and two Kilo-class submarines were deployed to the Pacific. In the same month, a Chinese vessel in the South China Sea chased Malaysian ships (Sharman 2015).

From May to June 2010, Indonesians were arrested by Chinese paramilitary ships in the South China Sea. In May 2011, China constructed poles near the Philippines's Palawan Island. From April to July 2012, China and the Philippines confronted each other over Scarborough Reef (Thuy 2011). In January 2013, Chinese warships locked their fire control radar onto Japanese naval vehicles. In December 2013, a Chinese warship nearly collided with a US Navy guided missile cruiser, USS, Cowpens in South of Hainan Island (Townshend and Medcalf 2016).

The challenges and assertion by China through maritime intimidation gave the impression to American policymakers and Asian states that China was challenging and threatening American security interest in the Asia-Pacific region and China was seeking hegemony in the region by eroding American power. Moreover, by intimidating the Asian states, China was constraining Asian states relations with the U.S. Jeffrey Bader, the then Director of East Asia of the National Security Council in the initial years of the Obama administration observed, "The administration found a China that was newly assertive, especially in its territorial claims in the South China Sea, its challenge to the U.S. naval ships and its unhelpfulness on the Korean peninsula" (Bader 2013).

The assertion of the American leadership through the articulation of rebalance strategy by increasing naval presence in the Southern part of Asia-Pacific was a conscious effort to address the Chinese assertion and aggression, and to secure freedom of navigation and also deter Beijing from employing heavy handed tactics against the countries in its neighborhood in the Asia-Pacific region and also to offer confidence to other countries in the region who wanted to stand firm against any pressure from China at the moment and in the years ahead (Department of Defense 2014).

The third game changer was the disengagement or withdrawal announcement from Iraq and Afghanistan. The earlier discussion on the foreign policy debates in the U.S.

indicated that disengagement or withdrawal together with defence budget reduction and defence force reduction were reflection or American decline and erosion of American hegemony. As some scholars observed, President Barack Obama was committed to maintaining American primacy like all the other post-Cold War presidents. Quoting here is an interview of President Obama to the Australian Journalist Kerry O'Brien in April 2010, wherein he was asked: "How hard is it going to be for the Americans to adjust in a mature way to the increasing prospect that you can not be number one forever?" To which President Obama replied: "I actually think that America can be number one for a very...very long time..." (Mearsheimer 2010). The reply revealed Barack Obama's conviction of American hegemony's continuity. Later on, this aspect was further emphasized by President Obama in his address to the West Point graduating soldiers. He stated that America was and would continue to stay as the only indispensable nation in the world and that this status of the U.S. had been true for the century that has gone by and it would remain to be true for the century ahead. He also shared his belief that at the end, the U.S. must continue to lead the world on the international stage, since there is no other power like the U.S. President Obama also asserted at that time that the U.S. military was the backbone of American leadership and that he absolutely believed in American exceptionalism (Mearsheimer 2010).

Therefore, to affirm American primacy, administration officials and President Obama specifically from November 2011 onwards announced American primacy and leadership in Asia through the formulation of strategic posture which was the "Rebalance" policy to the Asia-Pacific region (Obama 2011, 12 November).

Available literature indicated that there were two strands of policy options proposed for addressing the changing Asia-Pacific strategic scene by the policy-makers in the State Department and the National Security staff at the White House (Lieberthal 2011).

One was led by then Deputy Secretary of State James B. Steinberg and then Senior Director for East Asia on the National Security Council, Jeffrey Bader. The other strand was led by the then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and then Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell, some Defence Department

officials and favourably received by then National Security Advisor Thomas Donilon. Steinberg and Bader proposed engagement of China in a successful cooperation to preserve the American leadership. The other group led by then Secretary Hillary Clinton showed a stronger position toward Beijing and the group also had more readiness to caution other countries in the Asia-Pacific region to be concerned about China's mounting strength and to join in concert to restrain China's plans (Council on Foreign Relations 2009). It appeared that President Obama was open and supportive of the Steinberg and Bader policy option in the beginning. Therefore, from 2009 to April 2011, the U.S. policy towards China was summarized by a policy of "strategic reassurances", which according to Steinberg, sought from China to exhibit that their growth "will not come at the expense of security and well-being of others (Department of State 2009, 26 February; Tsai 2013)."

A strategy for construction of mutual confidence, "strategic reassurance" was the key policy instrument that the U.S. prescribed for China to guarantee regional players on China's goals of a peaceful rise to power with transparency and value for the rule of law. The concept "strategic reassurance" was designed to ensure that Beijing and Washington shared a vision of win-win solution in multiple issue areas rather than zero-sum rivalries. The key words for the U.S.-Sino relations were "sharing the responsibility" and "sharing the leadership". However, during "the first two years of the Obama administration, the policy of strategic reassurances resulted in very little assurance from Beijing to the U.S. and its neighbours". Critics of the policy held that "strategic assurance was in reality appeasement towards China, letting Beijing get away with irresponsible acts that undermined human rights and other global norms important to the establishment of the rule of law" (Currie 2009).

More specifically, it was out pointed that the U.S. policy toward China was more:

"...characterized as one of all-out accommodation. Anxious to ensure the success of the President's first visit to Beijing scheduled for November 2009, the government put off any action or statement that could risk alienating Chinese leadership. The White House delayed a sale of arms to Taiwan that could have gone through that summer. Obama also declined to meet Tibetan spiritual leader after he had travelled all the way to Washington. The administration also

studiously refrained from any overt criticism of China's record on human rights. But neither Dalai Lama nor the arms sale to Taiwan could be put off indefinitely" (Hisahiko 2012).

Indeed that happened soon after the Beijing trip as China did not oblige Obama administration's effective cooperation on economic issues. It was followed by the Chinese assertion and provocation in the South China Sea threatening American maritime security interest as well. The U.S. no longer saw China as its partner in international affairs while it became uncertain about the role of China in the Asia-Pacific region. It seemed probable that the U.S. was abandoning its hopes for a G-2 formulation in managing the U.S.-China relations and international order as subsequent statements revealed (French 2014).

As the "strategic reassurance" policy of Steinberg and Bader did not produce the desired result, then Secretary Hillary Clinton pursued from January 2010 onwards some elements of her proposed policy options of affirming the U.S. primary and leadership in Asia which eventually led to the announcement of "pivot to Asia" policy in October – November 2011 by Clinton and President Obama, which later on came to be known as "rebalance policy" (Clinton 2011, 11 October).

On 28 October 2010, in a major speech in Honolulu, Hillary Clinton, stressed the U.S. strong interest in Asia which included economic, strategic leadership and stabilizing military influence (Department of State 2010, 28 October). Quoting then Secretary of Defence, Robert Gates, she noted that the United States was not simply a visiting power but a resident power in the Asia and Pacific region. Simultaneously, she affirmed that alliance relationship as "the cornerstone of American regional involvement" (Clinton 2011, 10 November).

On 22 July 2010, at the meeting of ASEAN Regional Forum in Hanoi, Clinton braved the rage of Beijing by going into the question of the territorial conflicts in the South China Sea region. She affirmed that the U.S. was not different from any other country and that it also had a national interest in protecting "freedom of navigation, open access to Asia's maritime commons and respect for international law in the South China Sea." On the territorial dispute in the South China Sea, Clinton declared that Washington was opposed

to “the use of threat or force by any claimant” (Department of State 2010, 23 July; Hisahiko 2012). Thus, in the fall of 2010, the various events such as U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s sixth trip to Asia, followed by President Obama’s declaration for his second trip to the region, heralded the arrival of a paradigm shift and dynamic change in America’s policy over the Asia-Pacific region (*The Straits Times* 2016).

Yet others termed the move as “Forward-Deployed Diplomacy” (Bower 2010). America’s new strategic interest in Asia-Pacific started becoming visible around July 2010 when Clinton resolved to speak honestly and openly on the South China Sea issue at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) that characterized a genuine and revamped pledge by the United States not just to be extensively engaged in the conception of new trade and security architecture in the Asia-Pacific, but, to also make sure that the United States’ presence is around consistently at anytime and anywhere, whenever any issue that may be of interest to the United States and the Asia-Pacific come up. When Hillary spoke about the strategic importance of the region, the words were spoken with the intention to be fully backed up with action (Department of State 2010, 23 July). Thus, the Obama administration’s tacit announcement heralded the decision to get on a forward-deployed diplomatic drive toward Asia-Pacific through the rebalance policy.

In September 2010, Hillary Clinton, after the event of the collision between a Chinese fishing trawler and Japanese Coast Guard vessels close to the Senkaku Islands, guaranteed the Japanese government that the Islands was covered under the purview of the U.S-Japan Security Treaty. Later on, in the run-up to the November 2010 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit in Yokohama, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama separately visited the Asia-Pacific region focusing on issues like economic cooperation, development and maritime security. These tours symbolically loaded circle around China possibly to restrain it. Hillary Clinton in late October 2010 had toured places including Vietnam, Malaysia, Hawaii, Guam, New Zealand and Australia. President Barack Obama’s visits focused on four important countries in the region such as India, Indonesia, South Korea and Japan (*The Japan Times* 2010; Hisahiko 2012). In India, President Obama, in a speech at the Joint Session of the Indian parliament, declared that the United States-India relations would be “one of the defining partnerships of the 21st century” and

an “indispensable partner”. He also pointed out that in Asia and around the world, India is “not simply emerging, India has emerged”. Referring to India’s economic surge, he declared that it was “one of the most stunning achievements in human history” (Obama 2010, 8 November; Raman 2010).

In Indonesia, Obama and Clinton launched the New Comprehensive Partnership Agreement. In Thailand, Clinton held out the Creative Partnership Agreement which brought the Thai and the Americans together to develop the sector of the Thai economy. On the whole, in the first two years of the Obama administration, especially Hillary Clinton and President Obama had in many ways, engaged with Asian nations and thereby, ending Asian states’ complain about American absenteeism in the Asia-Pacific region (Department of State 2010, 28 October).

Hillary Clinton, in a speech at the East-West Centre in Hawaii on 28 October 2010, designated ASEAN as the fulcrum of Asia’s regional architecture which was emerging (Department of State 2010, 28 October). She also declared Washington’s intension to strengthen and sustain the U.S. leadership in the region. The Obama-Clinton constructed Asian regional architecture included: (a) hub-and-spoke system of five bilateral military alliances such as Australia, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and Thailand; (b) bilateral partnership with India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam and New Zealand; (c) the Lower Mekong Initiative which is a partnership of the U.S. with four mainland Southeast Asia countries- Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. The partnership concentrated on building these countries’ sustainable development, environmental concerns, energy and climate change. (d) trilateral cooperation such as the U.S.-Japan-India, the U.S.-Korea-Japan and the U.S.-Japan-Australia; (e) participating and engaging multilateral regional institutions such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN Defence Ministerial Meetings, the U.S.-ASEAN Summit and the East Asia Summit (Department of State 2010, 12 January; Bower 2010).

Joining or leading the regional structures was inevitable to engage effectively in the region. The United States decision to join the East Asia Summit (EAS) and ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting had contain three main criteria such as first, fresh structures

needed to be created that have to acknowledge that ASEAN was at the core of it all; second, there should be an acceptance that structures thus created would be inactive unless ASEAN was strengthened by them; third, the United States was committed to greatly intensify and strengthen relationships with ASEAN and its core members. Both President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton starting in 2010, during Obama's first term, visited almost every ASEAN member, marking one of the most extensive visits in the 21st century in US engagement in Asia-Pacific. The American engagement in Asia-Pacific proved to be successful to certain extent with the passing of the US-Korea free Trade Agreement (KORUS). Obama continued with his Asia visits even after entering his second term; he was the first US President who has visited Burma since the end of the military rule in the country, showing support while the country slowly attempted to transition to a more open, democratic state (Obama and Kyi 2012; Bower 2010).

The Obama administration's reach to the ASEAN countries heralded a fresh approach by the U.S. As an influential think tank from the West Coast, the Asia Foundation reported that prior to these visits and renewed interest that Washington showed in the Asia-Pacific region, several Southeast Asian regional actors had already started to articulate concerns that the American government's lack of interest in the region could directly or indirectly cost the U.S. the chance to engage in determining and influencing in constructing the security architecture and agenda in the region, while at the same time, the neglect could result in disturbing the regional order and stability of Southeast Asian region (The Asia Foundation 2008).

The ASEAN countries had always been concerned that the indifference showed by the pre-Obama administrations toward the Southeast Asian nations might contribute in upsetting the stability of the region. By stability, they meant "the absence of serious military, economic, or political conflict among nation-states" (Ikenberry and Mastanduno 2003).

Southeast Asian countries did not want to get entangled in conflicts that could be disadvantageous to the regional interests and security of the countries of the region.

Moreover, any conflict which involved important countries like China, Japan or the U.S. would hinder growth in the region as well as place the countries of the region in a position where they would have to choose sides. At the same time, these Southeast Asian countries did not also want to be in a spot where they might be intimidated or pressured by the big powers which pose the possibility of demeaning their sovereign interests, principles, and freedom to manoeuvre. The countries of the region preferred stability and through approaches such as maintaining a balance of authority in the existing regional institutions and a balance of power in the Southeast Asian region they represented a collective approach (ASEAN 1999).

The reality was that the United States played a crucial role in pressing on the objectives of these Southeast Asian countries. The ways by which the United States helped advancing these aims were through U.S. dynamic participation in the discussions in the Asia-Pacific multilateral institutions to make sure there was a balance in all the discussions and decisions taken which included China (ASEAN 1999; The Asia Foundation 2008). The countries of this region also saw American military engagement in Asia as something that could effectively counterweight China's rise. They also felt the need for supporting Japan-U.S. alliance as it would check Japanese remilitarisation efforts (Council on Foreign Relations 2014).

Obama Administration and Asia-Pacific Focus

Unlike Bush's era policies of strengthening predominantly bilateral relations, Obama administration's keenness in backing up the regional organisations in strengthening the security structure of the region was being applauded by the ASEAN leaders (Department of State 2010, 12 January).

The ASEAN leaders viewed such interest and support by the Obama administration as having a constructive result on regional as well as national security architecture. Further, ASEAN places more importance on the process of achieving the deliverables than on the actual deliverables. Unlike the other regional organisations, ASEAN members are convinced that the norms, on which ASEAN is built, are necessary for a regional

institution which aims to form and realize a culture of self-discipline in the demeanour of the powerful countries toward Southeast Asia and each other. ASEAN is acknowledged to have such norms as non-interference, consensus and peaceful settlement of disputes (Department of State 2009, 26 February). The Obama administration showed willingness to support these norms.

In April 2011, Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg and Jeffrey Bader, Director of East Asia on the National Security Council resigned. That facilitated then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and then Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell with the support of the National Security Advisor Thomas Donilon and Defence Secretary Leon Panetta to formulate the rebalance policy to Asia to construct the Asian regional architecture. Available literature indicated that by October 2011, President Obama seemed to have given accent to the pivot/rebalancing policy to Asia and the Pacific region. Indeed, for two key architects of the rebalance policy, Clinton and Campbell, presidential support meant giving the rebalance policy the top-down political support that it needed to navigate bureaucratic fights within government bureaucracies over strategy and allocation of resources (The White House 2011, 9 November ; Lieberthal 2011).

Seven texts revealed the nature and context of the rebalance policy to Asia-Pacific region. They also showed how the United States viewed its interest, objectives and response to Asia. Chronologically, they included: then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's article titled "America's Pacific Century" published in *Foreign Policy* magazine in October 2011 (Clinton 2011, 11 October); the speech delivered by then Secretary Clinton at the East West Centre in Honolulu on 10 November 2011 (Clinton 2011, 10 November); the remarks given by President Barack Obama at the APEC CEO Summit on the Asia-Pacific region at Honolulu on 12 November 2011 (Obama 2011, 12 November); the famous speech delivered by Obama in the Australian Parliament on 17 November 2011 (Obama 2011, 17 November); statements made by President Obama at the Bali East Asia Summit held on 19 November 2011 (The White House 2011, 19 November); and the Department of Defense (DOD) document titled "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense" which is also referred to as the Defense Strategic Guidance or DSG

published in January 2012 (Department of Defense 2012, 3 January); and statement presented by then National Security Advisor Tom Donilon to the Centre for Strategic and International Studies on rebalancing on 15 November 2012 (The White House 2012, 15 November).

America's foreign policy stood at a pivotal point when then Secretary Clinton boldly declared the new strategic framework in her article titled "America's Pacific Century" stating that the 21st Century would be America's Pacific Century, after having ended the war in Iraq and gradual withdrawal from Afghanistan. She affirmed the rebalance/pivot policy to Asia and Pacific region three times, which was significant, and reiterated the need for US leadership to solve problems in the region. It is important to note six elements Clinton outlined for regional diplomacy: firstly, increased engagement in regional multilateral architectures; secondly, to strengthen bilateral security partnerships; thirdly, to expand working relationship with the emerging powers of the Asia and Pacific region including China and India; fourthly, deepening investment and trade relationships; fifthly, promotion of democracy and human rights; lastly, building a broad-based military presence over the region. Thus, rebalance to the Asia and Pacific region was declared officially to the world. The phenomenon was defined by re-establishing the old as well as existing alliances and partnerships, building new ones and directing these efforts toward constructing a strategic framework over Asia-Pacific stretching till the Indian Ocean. Indian Ocean is strategically important because of the energy resources and trade that goes through it and the Straits of Malacca before reaching the manufacturing centers of East Asia. This region only is highly significant with half of the world's population and is home to many of the allies of the U.S. and emerging powers like China, India and Indonesia (Clinton 2011, 11 October).

Clinton's speech at the East West Centre, Honolulu, was further instrumental in insisting that the United States must be smart to identify areas for investing its time and energy "to sustain our leadership, secure out interest and advance our values" as a Pacific power (Clinton 2011, 10 November). She also affirmed stating:

"As the war in Iraq winds down and American begins to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan, the United States stands at a pivot point. Over the last 10 years, we

have allocated immense resources to those two theatres. In the next 10 years, we need to be smart and systematic about where we invest time and energy, so that we put ourselves in the best position to sustain our leadership, secure our interests and advance our values. One of the most important tasks of American statecraft over the next decade will, therefore, be to lock in a substantially increased investment- diplomatic, economic, strategic, and otherwise- in the Asia-Pacific region” to achieve “a more mature security and economic infrastructure..... As the wars wind down, we need to accelerate efforts to pivot to new global realities.... At a time when the region is building a more mature security and economic architecture to promote stability and prosperity, U.S. commitment there is essential as a Pacific power... This kind of pivot is not easy, but we have paved the way for it over the past two-and-a-half years, and we are committed to seeing it through as among the most important diplomatic efforts of our time” (Clinton 2011, 10 November).

The speech, on 10 November 2011 at the East – West Centre, Hawaii, was a clear major policy Secretary Clinton that again affirmed rebalance/pivot to Asia-Pacific and identified the geographical scope of the policy. She said, “It is becoming increasingly clear that, in the 21st century, the world’s strategic and economic center of gravity will be the Asia-Pacific, from the Indian subcontinent to western shores of the Americas” (Clinton 2011, 10 November).

As both Clinton and Campbell were the key concerned officials of the policy, their declaring areas such as East and South Asia as strategic was significant, as 70 percent of ship borne oil and petroleum get transported and 50 percent of estimated global container traffic passes through this area. It was clear that the rebalance policy had recognised the evolving strategic rivalry between emerging powers like China and India and to bring this sub-region of Asia into the bigger picture of the Asia-Pacific framework (The White House 2011, 9 November).

Hillary Clinton went on to stress that the Obama administration was seeking to develop closer ties with Beijing when she used the speech ahead of the Asia-Pacific summit which the U.S. hosted at Honolulu, to persuade China and others against thinking that the United States was ceding its traditional role in the Pacific. Hillary Clinton also asserted that the various issues that had plagued the region such as territorial disputes, nuclear arms race and North Korea’s provocation and the growing economic importance

of the region – all of these needed the leadership of the U.S. to maintain stability and security. Her statement also touched upon the fact that American statecraft and leadership would be increasingly required in areas related to diplomacy, strategic, economic and other related issues in the region. A clear message was also sent out that the economic aspect of the rebalance was going to become a front runner of the policy with a more emphasis on initiatives to open markets for improved trade and investment, while at the same time, the administration pushed forward the political, diplomatic and strategic aspects of the foreign policy strategy (Clinton 2011, 10 November).

In order to achieve this, America would push for a rule-based order where there is free, open fair and transparent market system. Hillary Clinton also sent a message to China that the U.S. was watching China's human rights policies closely and went on to criticise Beijing's handling of the Tibet issue and even the house arrest of the Chinese lawyer Chen Guangcheng. This was a step to affirm that the U.S. wanted to cooperate with China but not at the cost of losing its credibility as a democratic-legitimate leader in the region. Even if the U.S. had said that it did not want to constrain China, Washington wanted to assure its regional allies and partners that it would continue to protect the security and stability of the region by acting as a counterbalance to China's aggressive political, economic and military influence in the Asia-Pacific region and demand that Beijing play by the rules (Clinton 2011, 10 November; Eckert 2011).

As the America's momentum on Asia-Pacific was building up, President Barack Obama went on to make an undisputedly momentous statement on 'rebalancing' during the APEC CEO Business Summit in November, 2011 where the President himself declared, "America is a Pacific power and we intend to be here, actively engaged in trying to boost the economy worldwide and for our respective countries..." (Obama 2011, 12 November).

At the Summit, Obama gave emphasis on two clear themes. Firstly, the U.S. was intent on re-establishing a U.S. leadership role in Asia after a decade that focused largely on the Middle East. Secondly, Obama pointed out that Asia was vital to the U.S. in its path to economic recovery and in creating job. He also stated that the region was absolutely

critical in America's economic growth. Asserting the utmost vitality of the Asia-Pacific region, at the moment, he stated that Washington was pleased to be encouraged by its partner countries to engage in the region, despite the challenges ahead, to bring reforms and changes in the present competitive global economy. Therefore, it was eager to work together with them on a whole range of issues including ensuring stability, free flows of commerce, maintenance of maritime rules and drilling, guarantee openness and fairness; without being undermined "on trade agreements like TPP, or the security issues that face the Pacific" (Obama 2011, 12 November).

Another decisive speech Obama delivered with regard to rebalance policy was during his Australian visit on 17 November 2011. In the Australian parliament, during his speech, he vowed to expand American influence in the Asia-Pacific region and "project power and deter threat to peace". Here again, he declared in his speech saying, "The United States is a Pacific power, and we are here to stay." The commitment was more than just showing the flag (Obama 2011, 17 November). He also said:

"I have directed my national security team to make our presence and mission in the Asia-Pacific a top priority. As a result, reduction in U.S. defence spending will not, I repeat, will not come at the expense of the Asia-Pacific region. Indeed, we are already modernizing American defense posture across the Asia-Pacific. It will be more broadly distributed, maintaining our strong presence in Japan and the Korean peninsula, while enhancing our presence in South-East Asia" (Obama 2011, 17 November).

Stressing his intent to increase influence in the region with military build-up including announcing stationing of aircraft and troops in Australian bases, Obama avoided a confrontational tone with China in his speech to the Australian Parliament. He said: "we've seen China can be a partner, from reducing tension on the Korean peninsula to preventing proliferation" (Obama 2011, 17 November).

Therefore, Obama appealed to China saying, "We seek more opportunity for cooperation with Beijing including greater communication between our militaries to promote understanding and avoid miscalculations". In a note of caution, however, the president added, "We will do this, even as we continue to speak candidly with Beijing

about the importance of upholding international norms and respecting the universal human rights of the Chinese people” (Obama 2011, 17 November).

Moreover, Obama demanded that China stopped ‘gaming’ the international system. He also stated that China, which often presented itself as developing country, was growing up and therefore, should start acting that way in the international affairs. Obama admitted that his visit to Australia was part of his administration’s deliberate action to push forward prosperity, security and human dignity across the Asia-Pacific as a Pacific nation, where many had come from the Asia-Pacific region resided and had taken roots in the country and that had been a long and thorough process from where America could not return. Obama also clarified that the region was critical in realizing America’s main concerns, creating employment opportunities at home and abroad. Moreover, Obama declared that Asia would decide the future of most part of the century since the region holds most of the population of the world and more importantly, the majority of the countries with nuclear ability make up the Asia-Pacific region. Thus, President Obama proclaimed the US as a Pacific nation for securing peace and stability in the region and beyond in the long run (Obama 2011, 17 November).

Following the visit, President Obama attended the East Asia Summit, the first by an American President, in Bali held in November 2011. President Obama along with the other Asian-Pacific leaders talked about the need for cooperation on the most urgent issues in the region including political and security crisis (maritime security included), disaster response and non-proliferation. The President highlighted Washington’s shared interest for a broader leaders’ discussions, and also reaffirmed America’s mutual interest in reiterating and upholding international rules and norms in the above mentioned regional issues; augmenting partnership capability to tackle existing and newly developing challenges; and advancing regional cooperation (The White House 2011, 9 November).

Between the Honolulu APEC Summit and East Asia Summit in Bali, Indonesia, Chinese officials expressed reservations of the rebalance policy to the Asia-Pacific by the US. According to Wang Dong of Peking University, while the hardliners in China including

officials perceived the U.S. rebalance to Asia as “encirclement”, “blocking” or “containment” of China’s rise, quite a number of moderates held that the U.S. returning to Asia would not necessarily render China and the U.S. “strategic rivals” or develop into “comprehensive confrontation” (*Xinhuanet* 2016; Don and Chengzi 2013).

Nevertheless, in the initial declaration of the U.S. return to Asia, the Chinese found it difficult to accept the U.S. as a Asia—Pacific power. In the context of South China Sea maritime conflict, the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, at the East Asia Summit at Bali, declared that “outside forces” had no excuse to get involved in the complex South China Sea maritime dispute – a veiled warning to the United States and other countries out of the sensitive issue. He pointed out that the maritime dispute “ought to be resolved through friendly consultation and discussion by countries directly involved. Outside forces should not under any pretext, get involved (Kim 2013).”

Diplomatically, President Obama, at the East Asia Summit at Bali, directly confronted Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao for Beijing’s extensive claims in the South China Sea, putting Wen on the defensive by telling him:

While the U.S. is not a claimant in the South China Sea dispute, we have a powerful stake in maritime security in general and in the resolution of the South China Sea issue specially – as resident Pacific power and as a guarantor of security in the Asia-Pacific region (*The New York Times* 2011).

The strong affirmation and declaration by Obama that the U.S. is a Pacific nation and resident Pacific power influenced the Chinese officials to change their stand on referring indirectly to the U.S. as an outside power (Don and Chengzi 2013).

On 27th December 2011, Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister Le Yucheng noting that the U.S. “has never left the Asia-Pacific,” argued that China “has neither the desire nor the capability to push the United States out of the region”, but, “the Pacific Ocean is vast enough to accommodate the co-existence and cooperation” between the two big powers such as China and the United States, he observed (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2011). Similarly, in his visit to the United States in January 2012, Chinese Vice President Xi

Jinping told the Washington Post, “the vast Pacific Ocean has ample space for both China and the United States” (*The Washington Post* 2012)

The new “strategic guidance” paper published by the Pentagon clearly explained Washington’s ‘rebalancing’, the purpose and plans of shifting its strategic priorities from the West Asia to the Asia and Pacific region and the Persian Gulf as manifestation of identifying two crucial geostrategic regions of interests (Department of Defense 2012).

The then National Security Advisor Tom Donilon speaking at the Center for Strategic and International Studies stated that the whole idea of revamping America’s leadership role would moreover mean rebalancing its foreign policy to make certain that America’s focus and resources match its priorities in terms of deeper economic, security and political engagement. For instance, in terms of economic engagement, he highlighted that the region is expected to account for about 50 percent of total global growth outside the US by 2017 and so forth. With all the imports and exports between the region and the US, America’s economic recovery and economic growth heavily hinged on the economic strength of the Asia-Pacific. On the security front, Asia being the centre of a number of global militaries and flashpoints like the Korean Peninsula, the United States had responsibilities to protect the stability of the region and even deal with non-traditional security issues. US would also strengthen diplomatic and multilateral alliances through APEC, ASEAN and TPP. He also mentioned that by 2020, 60 percent of the US naval fleet would be present in the Pacific. Maritime security and law enforcement partnerships would continue to grow right through the Southeast Asia and Oceania to make sure commerce and freedom of navigation is unhindered (The White House 2012, 15 November).

By the end of 2011 and beginning of 2012, the Obama administration clearly reaffirmed and declared that it would strengthen its role in the Asia-Pacific region which would cover such regions as East Asia, Southeast Asia, Australasia, and the coastal region of South Asia. When Obama visited Australia, during the speech to the Australian parliament, he described the bond which ran deep between the two nations since time immemorial. He also reaffirmed the relationship between the two countries, saying that it

was rooted in their values which were renewed by every generation. Obama explicitly put forward that his visit to Australia was to strengthen his administration's efforts to press forward security, prosperity and human dignity across the Asia Pacific. He also emphasized on the importance of strengthening the political, social and economic structures at home as they were important in building the foundation of U.S. leadership in the world, which included the Asia-Pacific region. The United States claimed that the country had always been a pacific nation and that many from Asia-Pacific region had come, resided and taken root in the country and this has been a long and tough process which America was not willing to reverse back (Obama 2011, 17 November).

Obama stated that the region was decisive in realizing America's highest priorities, at home in creating employment opportunities for the people in the country and abroad; as Asia would, for the most part, decide the future of the century as most of the world's population and more importantly, most of the countries with nuclear capabilities make up the Asia-Pacific region. Against this backdrop, Obama proclaimed that the United States as a Pacific nation had to play its vital role in a big and long term manner in shaping the Asia-Pacific region and its future (Obama 2011, 17 November).

President Obama's first foreign trip since his re-election on 6 November 2012, was to the Asia-Pacific region (fifth trip to the region in four years) which sent a "powerful signal" that the region would remain a strategic priority for the United States and a focus for its diplomatic activity, resources and engagement, said NSA Tom Donilon. He informed about Obama's planned trip to Thailand, Burma and Cambodia from 17-20 November 2012 where the President participated in the East Asia Summit in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. He pointed out that no American President had ever visited Burma or Cambodia, and that President Obama was the first U.S. President to visit Thailand as well. Donilon also affirmed that under President Obama's direction, the U.S. forces on the Asia-Pacific region was "grounded on the simple proposition that the United States is a Pacific power whose interests are inextricably linked with Asia's economic, security and political order. American success in the 21st century is tied to the success of Asia" (The White House 2012, 15 November).

As part of this, Obama administration's overarching objective was to "sustain a stable security environment and a regional order rooted in economic openness, peaceful resolution of disputes, democratic governance and political freedom." Across the region, the United States hoped to see the rise of new powers occurring peacefully, where vibrant commerce would be empowered by free access to trade routes and cyberspace, and where the people of the Asia-Pacific region "increasingly have to ability to influence their government and universal human rights are upheld," Donilon declared (The White House 2012, 15 November).

On 18 November 2012, the oldest U.S. ally in Asia (180 years) Thailand hosted President Barack Obama and then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton for a high-profile visit to the country, however, the earlier visit by then Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta to the country, which was not so publicized, on 15 November 2012, was the one that led to the main momentous result – the agreement of new joint vision statement for the Thai-U.S. Defense Alliance. While this reflected Washington's priority in reviving governmental security ties with the Thai leadership, the public opinion in Thailand expressed reservations as they were increasingly influenced by the Chinese soft power (Obama, Barack and Shinawatra 2012). In 2010, Thailand became a "strategic partner" of China. Even if Japan happened to be Thailand's largest traditional partner in foreign direct investor and partner for development assistance, there was no doubt that public support for Thailand-China relationship was strong (East-West Center 2012).

In addition, Thailand had large trade deficit with both Japan and China while it enjoyed significant surplus with the United States. Nevertheless, Obama-Clinton visit promoted competition between Beijing and Washington for influence (East-West Center 2012).

Significantly, the U.S.-Thai security relations continued along with military exercises (from 9 – 20 February 2015, Thailand participated in annual Cobra Gold military exercise led by the U.S. military), and Thailand also provided access to strategically important facilities throughout its territory. All the benefit accruing under the designation of Thailand as "non-NATO" ally continued till the military coup in May 2014. These benefits included the credit guarantee for major weapon purchase, Foreign Military

Financing Assistance and International Military Education Training (IMET) (U.S. Embassy & Consulate in Thailand 2015).

Obama's visit to Myanmar appears to have been made possible by certain political reforms by the ruling military generals. For the United States, Myanmar's 2010 election, release of some political prisoners and easing press restrictions were enough for it to reach out to the long-ostracized country. Washington overlooked the election's flaws and welcomed the election of pro-democracy activist and National League for Democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi to Myanmar's legislature (The White House 2012, 9 November).

Soon after, then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton invited Myanmar to join the Lower Mekong Initiative, America's primary development engagement tool with South East Asia, and visited Myanmar capital Naypyidaw in November 2011. In September 2012, Aung San Suu Kyi toured the United States and at the end of her visit to the White House, Obama pledged to allow American companies to "responsibly do businesses in Burma". To facilitate this process in late September 2012, the United States took its first step to dismantle its economic sanctions regime against Myanmar. Meanwhile, the Myanmar's generals, especially President Thein Sein took the opportunity to diversify their country sponsors by cancelling the Myitsone dam project despite strong Chinese pressure to go ahead with Chinese assistance. The dam project's cancellation was the first time any Southeast Asian country openly defied China (Department of State 2017, 27 January).

With this backdrop, Obama's visit to Myanmar appears to have two dimensions. Firstly, the U.S. wished to take advantage of Myanmar's economic potential ever since Myanmar parliament passed a foreign-investment law removing some restrictions on foreign ownership of joint venture and also as prospects for reforming the mining laws increased. Secondly, the rush was also part of the rebalance/pivot to Asia strategy in which all Southeast Asian countries, including Myanmar, were critical components (Routray 2012).

On 18 November 2012, a day before Obama's visit, Myanmarese naval officers boarded the amphibious assault ship USS Bonhomme Richard in the Andaman (Department of the Navy 2012).

In October 2012, a delegation of thirty military and civilian U.S. officials visited Myanmar, in what could be the most comprehensive push for military to military dialogue between the two countries. In February 2013, Myanmar armed force participated as observers in the U.S.-led military exercise "Cobra Gold" in Thailand. This exercise had the participation of the seven nations including Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore Thailand and the U.S. promoting the strategic rebalance cause (Department of Defense 2013).

A CSIS report indicated that as many as 175 tatmadaw officers of Myanmar attended the U.S. military schools from 1980 to 1988. The training was shut down in 1988 as a reactionary measure to repression of civilian protest by Tatmadaw (CSIS 2013). Moreover, the U.S. also appeared to be determined to take Myanmar as an important partner in many of its military priorities in the Southeast Asia, by getting into a promising military engagement which would continue to support political reforms (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2013, 25 April, S. HRG. 113-138).

President Obama attended the East Asia Summit which was held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia on 20 November 2012. One important matter drew the attention of the participants. Chinese effort through Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen to secure Chairman's draft closing statement declaring that the leaders had reached a consensus not "internationalise the issue" of maritime and territorial disputes had to be contradicted and corrected. This matter was again promoted by the Chinese leadership at the Brunei East Asia Summit in October 2013 (*The Economist* 2014).

President Obama was not present at the East Asia Summit in 2013 as his government faced a "partial shutdown". The President instead was able to send his Secretary of State John Kerry to attend the Summit. The US, Japan and the Philippines wanted to encourage their allies in the Asia "to use the rule of law to resolve the maritime and territorial

disputes with China”. Secretary Kerry pushed the agenda by asking the six parties who were part of the South China Sea dispute “to negotiate a code of conduct as soon as possible to resolve the outstanding issues. To this, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang reiterated that China’s position on South China Sea contention was still the same wherein negotiations “should only be held between concerned parties and that disputes in the sea should not get in the way of ASEAN-China economic relations” (*The Economist* 2014).

On 28 April 2014, Obama ended a four country tour of Asia including Japan, South Korea, Malaysia and the Philippines. These trips were intended as affirmation of America’s undaunted rebalance policy to the Asia-Pacific region. To varying degrees, all four Asian governments were looking for beefed-up military and diplomatic commitment from Obama – in view of the rise of China and, in cases of South Korea and Japan, the threat from North Korea too (Republic of the Philippines 2014; *The Economist* 2014).

Japan, the Philippines and Vietnam as Factors in US Decision on Asia-Pacific

Japan and the Philippines were victims of China’s constant intimidation. They were both confronting China “over the disputed islands and shoals in the East Asia Sea and the South China Sea respectively”.

“Japan and the Philippines are treaty allies of America, and both received the extra support they felt they deserved. Japan welcomed Obama’s unequivocal declaration that the Senkaku islands – which the Chinese call the Diaoyus – would be covered by the bilateral Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security agreement in the event of an armed attack on them. This was the first time a sitting President had made America’s commitment explicit and was intended to reassure the government of Japan’s Prime Minister Abe that America would indeed come to Japan’s aid in the event of a serious Chinese incursion. Likewise, the Philippines President Benigno Aquino welcomed the signing of the new ten-year Defense pact. America had a significant military presence in the region for the first time since American forces left base at Clark and Subic Bay in 1992.

Obama's two-day trip to South Korea, the most substantive outcome, was also military in nature" (The White House 2015, 16 October).

When President Park Geun-hye visited the United States in October 2015 for the second time, President Obama declared that the US stood with South Korea over the North Korean provocations (The White House 2015, 16 October).

President Obama's attendance at the U.S.-ASEAN Summit on November 21, 2015 and the EAS leaders meeting on 22 November 2015 in Kuala Lumpur showed the Obama administration's continued commitment to listen to the advice of the scholars and practitioners to boost its engagement in the Southeast Asian region. Obama also launched the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) which would work toward enhancing people-to-people relationships between the United States and the Southeast Asian region and cultivate human resources in the region for stability and prosperity (The White House 2015, 21 November).

The US-Vietnam bilateral tie was bolstered further by President Obama's visit from 22-25 May 2016 when the American administration completely lifted the long-standing ban on lethal weapons. This was a big step forward to building a de facto security partnership and helped in formulating Asia – Pacific strategy (Vu and Lan 2016).

Chapter 3

Political and Diplomatic Strategy

Introduction

Regionalism for the United States, in the Asia-Pacific context, as a strategic approach was a pivotal phenomenon. Asian regionalism started acquiring an altogether new momentum in the 21st century. To the Asian governments, ideals such as ‘stronger integration’ and ‘community-building’ are important aspects in regional cooperation and growth. Thus, in order to accomplish these ideals, the governments of the region created new regional organisations, welcoming countries that were interested in building cooperation and stability in the region. American foreign policy makers held the view that if East Asia handled the course of action of conflict resolution with much wisdom and craftiness, there is a high possibility of changing the security scenario and regional anarchy to improved cooperation and stability (Department of State 2009, 26 February).

The then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated in her *Foreign Policy* article: “As the war in Iraq winds down and America begins to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan, the United States stands at a pivot point” (Clinton 2011, 11 October). This quote explained Obama administration’s seriousness about engaging in the region.

“Diplomacy takes place in both bilateral and multilateral contexts. Bilateral diplomacy is the term used for communications between two states, while multilateral diplomacy involves contacts between several States often within the institutionalized setting of an international organization. Negotiation is one of the most important means of conducting diplomacy ... treaties between States and the codification of international law” (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Government of the Swiss Confederation 2008: 3).

Obama’s administration declared through a report *Setting Priorities for American Leadership: A New National Security Strategy for the United States* published in 2013, its objectives in conducting diplomatic relations. The report stated America’s global role as: “The advancement of an open, rules-based international order that promotes universal values of liberty, democracy, human dignity, and economic freedom is essential to the

security and economic vitality of the United States” (Goldgeier and Volker 2013; The White House 2015).

Here in this chapter, an attempt has been made to discuss the bilateral relationships and the multilateral alliances which exist between the countries in the Asia-Pacific region and the resultant cooperation and conflict among these countries. These relations were the central focus of U.S. engagement in the region during the Obama administration. After the end of the Cold War, alliance partners such as Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and Australia started searching for common reasons to sustain the alliance relationships and also to address transnational security issues. Maintaining the stability of the region became a vital focal point of bilateral and multilateral organisations.

According to Daniel R. Russel, then Assistant Secretary, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Department of State, US policy of rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific contained the following: some of them are mentioned as follows: traditional alliances should be reinforced; the continuity of the system of alliances whether be it bilateral or multilateral depended on the sustained sense of shared values and an awareness that the existing system of alliances help to maintain the stability, peace and good of the region. However, the responsibility of sustaining the well-being of the region would depend on the partners involved in the alliances and the countries of the Asia and the Pacific region (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2014, 5 February, Serial No. 113 – 123).

Political Significance of the Rebalance

Analyzing the political aspect of rebalance/pivot policy is important as Obama administration’s view of Asia-Pacific, especially, China, changed as Beijing became more assertive as the administration entered its second term. The policy adopted by Obama administration was one of the foremost driving forces behind the major shift in the United States foreign policy, especially with regards to its China policy. As Obama entered office, he attempted to end the two wars (in Iraq and Afghanistan). This was followed by the demonstration of increased interest and venture in the Asia-Pacific region. Washington officials have time and again claimed that as a super power, the U.S. never left the region. The United States wielded its comeback with its new Asia-Pacific

strategy in the region. It is necessary to realize that Asia is not the same anymore. Currently, it has the economic and political clout to challenge the U.S., and even check the American attitude and actions towards the region (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 14 April 2015, Issue: Vol. 161, No. 53). However, as Robert Kaufman observed:

“The Obama Administration has embraced the three worst features of liberal multilateralism while abandoning its admirable commitment to promoting stable liberal democracy when possible and prudent. First, the Obama Administration has great confidence in the efficacy of multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, as arbiters of international legitimacy; this is a triumph of hope over experience. Second, the Obama administration has a deep aversion to wielding the hard elements of power, such as military power, in pursuit of traditional concrete geopolitical conceptions of the national interest. Third, the Obama administration radiates a zealous faith in the aptitude of soft power, such as the appeal of American culture, to tame the animosity of America’s enemies” (Kaufman 2010).

Suzanne Nossel, who coined the term “Smart Power”, proposed the idea to renew the doctrine of liberal internationalism in a prudent manner. Others such as Joseph Nye and Richard Armitage and then Hillary went on to capitalize the idea. The then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, in her opening statement at her confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (Hertzberg 2009) stated:

“We must use what has been called smart power, the full range of tools at our disposal- diplomatic, economic, military, political, legal, and cultural- picking the right tool, or combination of tools, for each situation... With smart power, diplomacy will be the vanguard of our foreign policy. This is not a radical idea. The ancient Roman poet Terence... declared that ‘in every endeavor, the seemly course for wise men is to try persuasion first’. The same truth binds wise women as well” (Clinton 2009).

President Barack Obama’s several visits to the region indicated the emerging importance of the region to US national security and interests. It clearly highlights the administration’s commitment to advancing US broader regional strategy of networking which was one of the aspects of the rebalance policy. Soon after President Barack Obama got elected, he visited Japan, Singapore, China and South Korea in November 2009. Then on the 10-day trip to Asia in November 2010, Obama visited India, Indonesia, South

Korea and Japan. In 2011, Obama visited Indonesia for a second time and went to Australia as well. On his fourth visit to Asia in 2012, the President visited Seoul to be present for the 53-nation international Nuclear Security Summit. Again in 2012 November, after winning the second term in office, President Obama came to Asia on his fifth official tour and went to Thailand, Myanmar and Cambodia. It was the first-ever visit to Myanmar and Cambodia by a US President (*The Straits Times* 2016).

A week-long trip to Asia in April 2014 marked Obama's sixth visit to the region where he made stops in Japan, South Korea, Malaysia and the Philippines. On this tour, Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) was an important issue. Thereafter, President Obama in November 2014 paid visits to China, Myanmar and Australia. During this trip, he attended the APEC Leaders Meeting in Beijing. Then in January 2015, Obama travelled to India, becoming the first US President to have visited India twice and to attend India's Republic Day parade as the Chief Guest. In 2015, Obama toured Malaysia and the Philippines. He attended important international meetings and conferences during the trip. In May 2016, Obama made historical visits to Vietnam and Japan. President Obama lifted the four-decade long arms embargo on Vietnam during this visit. Then in Japan, Obama went to the Peace Memorial in Hiroshima where he paid tribute to victims of the war, a first-ever for a sitting American President (*The Straits Times* 2016).

In the month of September, for the last time before leaving office, President Obama visited China from 3-5 September to attend the G-20 summit. It was described as "cementing their partnership on climate change and offering a rare display of harmony in a relationship that has become increasingly discordant" between the U.S. and China, where both the leaders – President Obama and President Xi Jinping – made a commitment to the Paris climate agreement (*The New York Times* 2016, 3 September).

Following this, as part of his last tour to the Southeast Asian region as the American President, Obama went on to visit Laos from 5-8 September 2016 to attend the East Asia Summit, where the leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations also were present in Vientiane. Obama became the first sitting American president to visit the Southeast Asian country. The visit was meant "to rebuild trust and close a dark chapter in the shared history between the two countries" (Hennessey and Lederman 2016).

On 8 September 2016, President Obama landed in Yokota, Japan for few hours to refuel the Air Force One. These were all the visits to the region during Obama's presidency. Also, he was the only American President who went the most to individual Indo-Pacific countries, visiting 15 individual countries in the Asia-Pacific (Office of the Historian, Department of State 2018).

The Asia-Pacific region has already become a machine generating and contributing a huge chunk toward the global economy. The region produces 30 percent of the world's exports as well as the two-way trade with the United States surpasses \$1 trillion per annum. At the same time, the region is accounted to hold two-thirds of the total world foreign exchange reserves. It hosts nearly half of the world's population while generating one-third of global GDP. It also contains the major Asian states that are becoming significant international political actors and world's most capable militaries, most importantly China which is becoming a super power. In terms of security development, China is aware of the need for stability in the region for her "peaceful rise". China's mounting military strength has created anxiety amongst the Asian countries, which at the same time rely on China for economic cooperation and growth (Bijian 2005; Wei 2010). Washington realized the dynamism of the region, increasing ranks of competent powers, booming trade and investment and growing people-to-people relations with the US (U.S. Congressional Hearing, A Majority Staff Report 2014).

The region has many challenges beginning with aspects such as security issues, non-proliferation of nuclear or weapons of mass destruction. All these became an inevitable matter of discussion. In the region, countries including China, India, Pakistan, North Korea and Russia are the ones with nuclear capabilities who have the resources and influence to challenge the non-proliferation progression. The American leadership under President Obama was vehemently entailed to reduce the proliferation and deployment of nuclear weapons in the region. All the parties involved also have a stake in the process of preventing possible arms race and transfer of nuclear technology and knowhow to states and non-state actors (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 16 July, Serial No. 114-74). Other challenges in the region included escalating maritime disputes, climate change,

terrorism, human rights issues, lapses in democratic governance in some countries, human and wildlife trafficking.

American policy makers saw that the various alarming issues in the region call for effective interest and cooperation through multilateral regional organizations. These organizations can be deficient and flawed. Nevertheless, they have implanted in themselves practices of cooperation and construct shared understanding. As a consequence, various countries in this globalized era have been attempting to discover ways in which there can be wider cooperation against the numerous security challenges, through such methods including customary political dialogue, visits and confidence building measures (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2010, 21 January, S. HRG. 111-708). Thus, the political significance of the Asia-Pacific policy was clear from the presidential visits. Further, in order to provide effective endorsement of U.S. national security interests in the Asia-Pacific region undeterred by important geopolitical alteration and movements, some strategic necessities were ordained to be followed by the Obama administration.

During the hearing on Principles of U.S. Engagement in Asia, Kurt M. Campbell, the then Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, Washington, DC, was present as a witness with a prepared statement. Kurt Campbell reiterated stating:

“The United States is a Pacific nation in terms of our history, our culture, our economy, and our national security... As the Asia-Pacific century emerges, defining the new international environment, the United States must enhance and deepen its strategic engagement and leadership role in the region... the Asia-Pacific region is home to many of the most pressing security challenges of the modern era...Our alliances remain the bedrock of our engagement in the region, and the Obama administration is committed to strengthening those alliances to address both continuing and emerging challenges...Burma is ambivalent about the United States...we have to sculpt each strategy toward each bilateral relationship and make very clear to our Vietnamese interlocutors that we, too, want a better relationship; we, too, want to work more closely together” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2010, 21 January, S. HRG. 111-708).

Kurt M. Campbell went on to assert that, in these countries some of the domestic problems, ranging from human rights issues to other areas in the society lacked the values and essence of democratic governance which made it difficult for the U.S to work with them. However, he was optimistic that over the last 15 or 20 years, the U.S. had been able to help them by giving suggestions and that even in the case of Vietnam, massive changes had been witnessed in many areas. He also asserted that the Obama government was also working with Burma to improve. Campbell also pointed out that human rights issues were addressed on a regular basis whenever the U.S. government interacted with the Chinese government. In the congressional hearing, there was much emphasis on human rights and democratic transition and other issues including cyber attacks and the Chinese repressive government, which were particular issues. ASEAN as a multilateral engaging institution was given much importance. However, a holistic view of the region to form a comprehensive policy towards the region as a response to its rising significance to American interests was missing all throughout (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2010, 21 January, S. HRG. 111-708).

Joseph Y. Yun, Acting Assistant Secretary, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, presented the fact that the administration pursued to promote an open economic order which was strong, inclusive, balanced and sustainable through a competitive and level playing field; impede the proliferation of fissile materials and weapons of mass destruction; sustain strategic stability and diversified security order whereby countries in the region pursued their national interests in agreement with international law and shared norms and principles in Asia-Pacific (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2013, 25 April, S. HRG. 113-138).

David F. Helvey, Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asia, Office of Security and Defense, U.S. Department of Defense integration with the rising powers in Asia which could not be ignored, with powers such as China, Japan, India and Russia; last but not the least, to concentrate on security issues, which was a must by enthusiastically participating in the region's multilateral political, economic and security arrangements (; U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 16 June, Issue: Vol. 161, No. 96).

On 19 November 2015, Scott Busby, Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asia and the Pacific, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor made a statement before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Subcommittee on East Asia, the Pacific, and International Cybersecurity Policy on “Democratic Transitions in Southeast Asia”. He stated that the Obama administration implemented America’s strategic rebalance in the Asia-Pacific region in which “democracy, human rights, and good governance” played important roles. And as the region covered a range of countries in democratic transition and therefore, he insisted that the U.S. had more work to accomplish (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 19 November, Issue: Vol. 161, No. 171).

Overall amalgamation of soft power, hard power and public diplomacy by the United States was presented to be an effective tool in the face of regional challenges in the Asia and Pacific region. Soft power seemed to side with the United States in the region as a foundation on which the Obama administration constructed, to a certain extent, his administration’s influence. However, the role of ‘public diplomacy’ could not be sidelined at the same time and therefore, enough resources was needed to be invested in the region by Washington. Furthermore, smart power, a result of attempts to prove that soft power alone could not create efficient foreign policy, was one of the most practical policies implemented by the Obama Administration through its rebalancing strategy towards the Asia and the Pacific region. Smart power, thus, presented three important features such as attraction, coercion and payment. As a result, America’s new redefining of military deployment trajectory, expansion of its security outline and promotion and implementation of free trade were vital parts of Obama administration’s strategic policy that backed up the political maneuvers towards the Asia-Pacific region (Cossa et al 2009).

Experts and Congressional Views

As part of the political establishment that conducts the US foreign policy, the US Congress plays a significant role. The Asia-Pacific region in particular, excited tremendous interest in both Senate and House of Representatives. Several hearings testified to the fact that the interest of the Congress was not only based on the direction of the US foreign policy, many represented domestic interests that would be affected by the

policy. In that context, the new rebalance policy in the region was driven by the aspiration to restore confidence in Washington's allies, partners and other countries that the U.S. was there to stay in the region without getting hindered by its escapades in the West Asia or its domestic economic and political issues. However, there were other factors that contributed to rebalance strategy such as addressing America's domestic fiscal and political instability (Lieberthal 2011).

The rebalance policy of the Obama administration needed both the support and approval of the executive and legislative branches of the government for a successful implementation of the policy in the Asia and Pacific region. Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power: The Politics of Leadership* (1960) argued that in the American system, specific foreign policy powers are held back for Congress to wield and limit the powers of the other two branches, especially, in this study, the President's power to decide on and execute foreign policy matters. The powers of the Congress include the power to declare war, raise an army, maintain a navy, and regulate foreign commerce (Neustadt 1960).

According to Lee Hamilton, in "Congress and US Foreign Policy," Remarks to the Trilateral Commission, 1999, there is a friction called "creative tension" that exists between the executive and legislative branches (Hamilton 1999). These tensions between Congress and the administration were partly an upshot of the Vietnam War, after which the Congress became more actively interventionist in foreign policy (Lindsay 1994).

During the Senate hearing (111-708) of "Principles of U.S. Engagement in Asia" on 21 January 2010 at the U.S. Senate, Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Committee on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC, James Henry Webb Jr., U.S. Senator (D – VA) made the opening statement. Webb stated that the region has been a "long overlooked area of our foreign policy rooted in the often contradictory standards" in the past which has continued till present when it comes to describing the underlining parameters of America's relationships with various countries and diverse governmental systems. The democrat senator affirmed the need to carry out a comparative assessment of the ways in which the administration should form policies to deal with Asian governments that effect America's relationships in the region and throughout the world.

He asserted that America's foreign policy should be predictable, consistent, and firm for America's credibility, furthermore affirm international stability. He also reaffirmed America's awareness of the increasing recognition of the significance of Asia to achieving America's national interest. Senator James Henry Webb Jr. argued that the United States must "communicate a sense of purpose and consistency in its dealings with every nation. He went on to argue that the U.S. had become "more vulnerable, strategically and economically" to China, however, America's growing and evolving relations with China "have not been preconditioned on the nature of its internal political system, nor its actions beyond its borders". (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2010, 21 January, S. HRG. 111-708).

Another case would be the U.S. relations with Vietnam which was becoming stronger in trade and political relations, despite Vietnam's letdown "to abide by its agreement in the 1973 Paris Peace Accords". Washington wanted Vietnam to hold free elections in Cambodia to end the 10-year Vietnamese occupation of the country (1979-1989). Senator James Henry Webb Jr. also mentioned Thailand, a partner country that had been reprimanded by the U.S. from time to time for "its struggle with elective politics". Burma, another Southeast Asian country who's military junta confirmed to hold election and reform its government but he stated that the U.S. had been slow in engaging with the country. Thus, the senator insisted that the U.S. foreign policy be more consistent, coherent towards the countries of Asia so that there would be no confusion, allegations and cynicism. He cited a retired Indian diplomat stating, "Central Asian countries see Western discourse on democracy and human rights as doublespeak from countries that pander to authoritarian regimes without scruples when it suits their business interests..." Webb also underlined that fact that China usually came in to help countries in the region when the U.S. left any vacuum or even when the U.S. put sanctions to reprimand a country, and this eventually enhanced Chinese influence in the region (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2010, 21 January, S. HRG. 111-708).

In the same hearing, James M. Inhofe, Senator from Oklahoma, ranking Republican member on this committee also raised questions related to democratic governance in the Asian region. He put forward the case that when the American government came into

contact with the Asian countries, it needs to look into their adherence to democratic values and freedoms on which the U.S. was founded. He further questioned how the Obama administration was planning to handle the communist country (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2010, 21 January, S. HRG. 111-708).

Inhofe also commented that, “It is a mixed result, and as such U.S. foreign policy must be sophisticated and nimble enough to utilize multiple approaches to further U.S. national security interests in East Asia. Realpolitik, unipolarity, pragmatism; whatever diplomatic strategy is implemented, it must also adhere to our core American values. That includes the pursuit of capitalism and free enterprise, but also respect for individual freedoms and basic human rights ensured through democratic institutions...I will be particularly interested in hearing the witnesses' comments regarding the U.S. relationship with China.” He went ahead to state that China with whom America’s trade relations had increased at a rapid pace, continued to crackdown on Tibetans and religious groups such as the growing Christian population and the Falun Gong, and human rights abuse and political suppression was rampant in the Asian country (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2010, 21 January, S. HRG. 111-708). It was hard to see whether the increase in contact with the U.S. influenced China in a positive way or not.

At the hearing, another witness was Robert Herman, Director of Programs, Freedom House (an independent nongovernmental organization committed to the expansion of freedom around the world.), Washington DC. Robert Herman, during his statement, underscored the weight and priority American foreign policy should give to the “advancement of democracy and human rights” when it deals with countries in the global arena. He went on to emphasize how the American government should engage with allies while deepening cooperation with the “established and nascent democratic states to bolster fundamental rights”. Moreover, he pointed out that the Obama administration “must pursue constructive relations with authoritarian states, where shared interests will be less robust”. Herman also noted out that ASEAN’s Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights, ICHR was the first mechanism the regional organization created to uphold human rights (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2010, 21 January, S. HRG. 111-708).

At the hearing on “Principles of U.S. Engagement in Asia”, Robert Sutter was one of the witnesses, a Visiting Professor of Asian, Studies, Georgetown University, Washington, DC. In his statement, Robert Sutter argued that as the Obama administration moved in to establish and sustain increased relations bilaterally and multilaterally throughout the Asian region, the main aim was to:

“use its strong position as the responsible leader in the region to advance the values Americans hold dear in less confrontational ways...As power relations change in Asia--notably on account of China's rise--Asian governments generally seek to work positively and pragmatically with rising China, on the one hand, but, on the other hand, they seek the reassurance of close security, intelligence, and other ties with the United States, in case rising China shifts from its current generally benign approach to one of greater assertiveness or dominance...” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2010, 21 January, S. HRG. 111-708).

Sutter asserted that the American government had the upper hand to exert influence in Asia through ways including “business, religious, education, and other interchange than through channels dependent on government leadership and support”. He supported the idea that the Obama government had employed to improve “U.S. stewardship in Asia with its consultative-engagement approach”, which had allowed the improvement of the United States image in the region and install “responsible stewardship of common goods, and persistent but respectful advocacy” in the region (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2010, 21 January, S. HRG. 111-708).

At the Senate Hearing on “Maritime Territorial Disputes and Sovereignty Issues in Asia”, hearing before the Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States, Senate one hundred twelfth, Congress second session on 20 September 2012, the committee met with Senator Jim Webb (Chairman of the subcommittee) presiding. Senators present during the hearing were Jim Webb (D – VA), Richard G. Lugar, and James Elroy Risch. Giving the opening statement, Chairman Jim Webb stated that the United States had a vital role to play in the Asian region, without its presence the region would have encountered a “far more volatile” political and security environment. The U.S. had shown “strong, enduring, vital interests in East Asia”, especially relating to the East and South China Sea. He went further to claim that the

disputes regarding the water bodies were open and active. The disputes entailed “not only claims to the land features, but also claims to surrounding waters. As all of these Asian nations have grown more prosperous, their sovereignty claims have become more fierce.” He stated that the United States and its policies were aimed towards pursuing “harmonious relations” with the countries of Asia. He also pointed out the fact that the countries such as Japan and the Philippines, in particular ASEAN countries, in the region are constantly observing America’s response to China’s increased assertiveness in the South China Sea and East China Sea, as the U.S. intensifies and expands its relations with them (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2012, 20 September, S. HRG. 112-610).

A prepared statement of Senator James M. Inhofe, (R – OK), Ranking Member of the Subcommittee, was submitted as part of the hearing. Senator Inhofe supported the idea that the U.S. and “other peace-seeking” countries needed to send a clear message to “Communist China” that Beijing’s actions of “continued harassment, and expansive administrative and military actions in this region, and specifically in the South China Sea” would not be accepted any longer (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2012, 20 September, S. HRG. 112-610).

In the opening statement of then Senator Richard G. Lugar (R – IN), he expressed his thanks to then Secretary Campbell for the “vigorous and tenacious work” relating to East Asia. This was followed by the statement of Kurt Campbell, then Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, Washington, DC. Kurt Campbell commended the republican senators present – Senator Lugar, and Senator James Elroy Risch (R – ID) - for allowing America’s engagement with the Asia-Pacific region based on a strong bipartisan support in the Congress over the years. However, he pointed out that such a bipartisan approach faced some disagreements too. Yet, he noted that President Obama’s administration and its point persons such as Hillary Clinton, Robert Gates and Leon Panetta pursued the policy of engagement with the region. With regards to the East and South China Sea disputes, to regulate the conduct of parties in the disputed waters, Campbell made it clear that the United States supported a firm binding code which was “based on international law and agreements, including the Law of the Sea Convention and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation” to resolve disputes. As

tensions went on rising, Kurt Campbell underscored that the Obama administration was engaging with all the parties involved in the dispute to handle the issues in a peaceful way through diplomatic approaches and “sustained interactive process” in accordance to America’s strategic interests (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2012, 20 September, S. HRG. 112-610).

The Obama administration made it firm and clear that America opposed the employment of “coercion, intimidation, and threats of force” and asked the parties involved in the disputes to make their claims clear and pursue them in a consistent manner in accordance to international law as enshrined in the Law of Sea. Kurt Campbell reminded the Congress that the administration and Hillary Clinton strongly supported the ratification of the agreement. He went on to draw attention to the fact that the Obama administration had been attempting to use bilateral and multilateral platforms to address the issues. He affirmed that the administration had witnessed “renewed diplomacy between ASEAN and China on issues associated with the South China Sea”. Kurt Campbell emphasized saying that America’s relations with allies such as South Korea and Japan, the fulcrum of the rebalance policy, would continue to remain close and endure as the U.S. stays in the region to maintain peace and stability in the region as tensions had the potential to destroy America’s strategic interests. He also mentioned that the U.S.-Japan-ROK trilateral relationship had become a significant “engine for promoting our mutual national security goals both in the region and around the world” over the past years. He stated that Washington desired to see “a stable and productive Japan-China relationship” which would serve the grand strategic interest of the U.S. as well as the region (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2012, 20 September, S. HRG. 112-610).

In 2014, at the 113th Congress, 2nd Session, H. Res 714, on “East and South China Sea disputes”, got a unanimous consent by a voice vote, which was then ordered favourably reported to the Full Committee. The resolution stated:

“...reaffirming the peaceful and collaborative resolution of maritime and jurisdictional disputes in the South China Sea and the East China Sea as provided for by universally recognized principles of international law, and reaffirming the strong support of the United States Government for freedom of navigation and

other internationally lawful uses of sea and airspace in the Asia-Pacific region” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2014, 17 September, H. Res. 714).

The U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations had a business meeting on 20 May 2014 which was presided by Senator Robert Menendez (D – NJ). In the legislation, Senate Resolution 412 of the 113th Congress (2013-2014) reaffirmed,

“the strong support of the United States Government for freedom of navigation and other internationally lawful uses of sea and airspace in the Asia-Pacific region, and for the peaceful diplomatic resolution of outstanding territorial and maritime claims and disputes” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2014, 20 May, S. Res. 412).

This resolution was passed in the U.S. Congress (Senate) with amendments and an amended preamble by unanimous consent on 10 July 2014 (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2014, 20 May, S. Res. 412).

Abraham M. Denmark, Senior Vice President, at the National Bureau of Asian Research testified on 26 February 2015 to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific on the subject, “Across the Other Pond: U.S. Opportunities and Challenges in the Asia Pacific”. He laid out a number of key political questions that would have major repercussions for the U.S. foreign and domestic policies toward the Asia-Pacific. He reiterated the fact that the as China’s aggressive actions increased in the region, especially, in the disputed waters, and that countries such as Japan and India became vital to the U.S. rebalancing policy in the Asia-Pacific region and that Washington must continue to develop relations with these important allies and partners in the region (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 26 February, Serial No. 114–8).

At this hearing, Karl D. Jackson, C.V. Starr Distinguished Professor of Southeast Asian Studies, School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, testified saying that the two rising powers – China and India – in Asia should be integrated into “a peaceful and prosperous structure similar to the one we have maintained since the end of World War II” as they both are major powers in the emerging “multi-polar Asian balance of power” that might pose challenge to American interests. He proposed that Washington should create “an Asia Pacific Council consisting exclusively of the Big

Four (China, India, Japan, and the U.S.)”, where all the major powers could take decisions on various matters and challenges that arise in the region. He also reminded the Congress that Japan remains to be the most important and biggest ally of the U.S. in the Asia-Pacific region (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 26 February, Serial No. 114–8).

In the Committee on House Foreign Affairs, Rep. Denny Heck (Democrat/Washington 10th District) introduced H. Res. 374, recognizing “the 50th anniversary of Singaporean independence and reaffirming Singapore’s close partnership with the United States”. This resolution was passed as the US recognized the 50th anniversary of “independence and nation-building” that Singapore celebrated in 2015. It also reaffirmed and observed the US-Singapore “close partnership” ahead of the 50th anniversary, in 2016, of the establishment of bilateral relations between the two countries. On 12 July 2016, the title of the measure was amended and it was agreed to by the House without any objection (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2016, 12 July, H. Res. 374).

Statement before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Subcommittee on East Asia, the Pacific, and International Cybersecurity Policy on “Democratic Transitions in Southeast Asia”, a Testimony by Murray Hiebert, Deputy Director and Senior Fellow, Sumitro Chair for Southeast Asia Studies Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) on 19 November 2015 laid out the status of countries in the Southeast Asian region and the process of democratization in these countries whether they are progressing forward or moving backwards. He expanded the discussions on Myanmar/Burma, Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia. Murray Hiebert affirmed that the United States had a critical role to play in the Southeast Asian region in making its perception known to countries regarding democracy and human rights. He pointed out that “pressure and sanctions” worked to achieve desired result only in few instances in “pushing a regime to reform, unless it has begun moving in that direction due to internal pressures”. The most ideal situation of bringing in transition to democracy in governments in the region had been when the United States led by setting “example rather than by carrying a stick”. In Burma’s case, realization and eventual reformation came when the country saw that “it was being left far behind by its neighbors” in

development and prosperity, and not so much because of U.S. sanctions. (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 19 November, Issue: Vol. 161, No. 171).

After making much political progress slowly, Vietnam's move to join the TPP agreement was also another example where sanctions did not do much but the country's leadership comprehension "the government would face greater internal challenges if it does not reform itself and respond to the needs of its citizens". Murray Hiebert further stated that in the Philippines, the USAID had done work to strengthen law and order, economic growth, improve governance, even by launching a Partnership for Growth program, which was agreed upon by both the countries in November 2011. He argued that the assistance programs provided by the Obama administration were more effective in bringing about progress and promoting democracy in the region which could be expanded more (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 19 November, Issue: Vol. 161, No. 171).

Aaron L. Connelly, a Lowy Institute (Sydney based think tank) Research Fellow, looked into the role of the Congress from 2011 – 2015 in foreign policy decision making. He argued that the so called "creative tension" that exists between the Congress and the Executive has ended up in forming a stalemate in policy making, which impacted the Asia-Pacific policy negatively with heavy consequences (Connelly 2015). It became a fact that few members in the Congress were focused on Asia-Pacific policy, as a whole. On rebalance policy towards the Asia-Pacific,

"...the loss in recent electoral cycles of senior leaders who might have once delivered bipartisan protection of important priorities has exacerbated the consequences of this decline, with serious ramifications... in the Asia-Pacific region in particular....Yet congressional dysfunction and inattention have repeatedly undermined the Obama administration's ability to execute its rebalance strategy... And where key members have sought to protect US engagement in the Middle East and Eastern Europe from the worst effects of congressional dysfunction, there have been far fewer efforts with regard to US engagement in the Asia Pacific... To the extent individual members have claimed to focus on the region, it has often been in pursuit of narrow objectives focused on a single country or issue area... When the press and members of Congress have made reference to the rebalance, they have frequently argued that the administration's strategy has failed because it has not been hard enough on Beijing" (Connelly 2015).

Thus, the rebalance suffered to an extent in the Congress as several members, more so in the House, were interested and had idea of specific issues and countries in the region – immigrant and ethnic population in their districts, promotion of democracy, human rights, human trafficking issues, nuclear-security problems, trade issues, cybersecurity, environmental and climate change issues, North Korean threat, U.S.-China relations and relations with few important allies – while, few members of the Congress gave their attention to the larger picture of Asia-Pacific policy. Congress lacked information, and coordination between the executive and legislature was insufficient even when the policy was announced (CRS 2012). Even the contents of TPP were secretive and many of the Congressmen were not aware of the terms of the treaty. Thus, it is clearly reflected that the Congress and the American public had given more powers to the executive to take important foreign policy decisions.

The result of the mid-term election in 2014 rendered President Obama less powerful as the Republicans won majority in the election and this made it more difficult for the administration to push for policy initiatives in the Congress. The East and South China Seas issues got more intensified around the second term of the administration and tensions rose. The maritime territorial disputes became one of the very few, if one can use the word – pan-Asian – issues that sparked collective bipartisan support, an issue which threatened the U.S. interest and counted the interest of several countries as well in the region, at a glance. Even if there was increased awareness for the need of a comprehensive strategic policy towards the region the policy along with a fairly bipartisan support, rebalance policy needed more detailed attention from the executive and stronger support base from the legislature and the American public (Connelly 2015).

Re-emphasizing Strategic Presence through Diplomacy

The Obama administration wanted to strengthen the diplomatic aspect of the rebalance policy through bilateral with core states, diplomatic, multilateral and alliance approach. The administration tried to build relations by wielding a leadership role with the countries in the region to meet common interests. The administration made efforts to fulfil its commitments and enhance engagement through bilateral means, especially, US – Japan, US – South Korea, US – Philippines and US – Australia. For rebalance approach, Japan,

South Korea, the Philippines and Australia were core states. Furthermore, diplomacy was pursued with states as India, Taiwan, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Myanmar, Singapore, Cambodia and Laos. Multilaterally, the diplomatic relations were pursued through regional organisations such as the EAS, ARF, ASEAN, APEC and the newly created TPP agreement. The Obama administration also pursued diplomacy through alliance approach by reviving ANZUS to engage with Australia and New Zealand. It also invested in building mediums of communication with its foes or competitor, that is, China and Russia even if competitions existed, while at the same time, facing increasing threats from North Korea (Department of State 2011, 31 March, Serial No. 112 – 15).

The Obama administration utilized the available means to engage with regional multilateral institutions to construct a flexible regional network capable of working with China and other rising powers of the region, while at the same time, hedging against the possibility that China has been seeking to rise as a hegemonic power in Asia, and thus, to achieve the objectives of America's broad strategic framework where a pluralistic security order is maintained with no single regional power domination. The United States, as an Asia-Pacific country, was expected to approach and sympathize regional matters with an Asian mindset, and act as a global and regional leader to peacefully manage the process of power growth and shift while China went on to be the other effective competitive power. The rebalance policy attempted to address the realities of the changing nature of power relations in the world and especially in the Asia-Pacific region. The policy's aim was to bring leaders of the rising powers together to engage and hold dialogues with the U.S on key issues concerning the security and stability of the region and the world. Time and again, it was reiterated that the rebalance strategy depended on the foundation of firm US ties to its allies and partners in the region, and its engagement with its foes and other countries as well to address common regional and international challenges (Department of State 2011, 31 March, Serial No. 112 – 15).

Bilateral Relations with Core States

US – Japan

In addition to whatever was happening in the Asia-Pacific region, Japan also appeared eager to reconsider its position by increasing its role in global political-security scenario. According to Takashi Inoguchi, professor emeritus of University of Tokyo, Japan has emerged from different phases into the present condition. By 2005, in Inoguchi's opinion, Japan went on to aim for "ordinary power" status from just being an economic superpower. Japan even assisted the U.S. in counter-terrorism by sending Self-Defense forces to foreign lands (Inoguchi 2008). Bhubhinder Singh, Assistant Professor at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, also opined that Japan's trajectory is shifting from a peace-state to an international state (Singh 2013).

The U.S.-Japan alliance was perceived by the Obama administration as the cornerstone of American strategic and security interest in the Asia-Pacific region. The two countries base their relationship on the basis of being successful democracies and largest economies of the world. In November 2009, when President Obama visited Japan he termed himself "first Pacific President" and declared the US to be a "Pacific" nation. He went on to announce Washington's willingness to engage in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) (Obama 2009, 14 November). Japan also needed the support of Washington and rebalance policy was a good option for Japan as threats increased from North Korea and China. Rebalance policy, at the same time, reassured America's support to Japan.

Obama again visited Japan from 12-14 November 2010 and pitched for American exports in Asia where the American President also attended the APEC Meeting Summit (Office of the Historian 2018). And in October 2015, the US and Japan along with other 11 Asia-Pacific nations concluded the TPP agreement. It represented a US-led high standard regional trade agreement (Office of the United States Trade Representative 2015).

The U.S. - Japan alliance could be traced back to the signing of the "Security treaty Between the United States and Japan" on September 8, 1951. This treaty was signed after the WWII in order to acquire U.S. military protection as Japan did not possess enough means to defend itself in case of any internal or external offensive threat as it was

disarmed. However, since the first treaty was deemed unequal, favouring the United States more, in 1960 the new treaty which came to be known as “Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan” was signed (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2014).

Since then, throughout all the ups and downs in relations, both the countries had engaged in each other’s affairs where the United States was the economic and security source. The most significant fact about the U.S.-Japan relationship is that the United States can shield Japan against any aggressor, however, not the other way round in view of the fact that Japan is restricted under article 9 of the post war Constitution from engaging in any confrontation (The Law Library of Congress 2006). The U.S.-Japan alliance was based on asymmetric reciprocity of cooperation by “goods and people”. Sakamoto also asserted that the US-Japan relations needed “the element of ‘cooperation by people and people’” which was required “to be established through the right to collective self-defense” (Sakamoto 2001).

With the expanding stress on the issue of Asia-Pacific security, several security experts in Japan stumble upon crucial questions with reference to how Japan and the United States should synchronize their security strategies, how China’s rise would be dealt with in U.S. grand strategy of rebalance. It was suggested that emphasis must also be given to how Japan and the United States should work on the new stance of U.S. forward deployment in the Asia-Pacific region. To this, suggestions through publications such as the U.S. Quadrennial Defense Review which came out in February 2010, along with the U.S. Department of Defense’ strategic guidance document released in 2012 and Japan’s new security policies ordered in the 2010 National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG), presented the two governments with a sturdy foundation for deeper dialogue on their security approaches. Japan’s specific interest in protecting and defending the south-western part of Japanese territory in accordance with the new NDPG’s guidance, was seen to have implication and support U.S. operational approaches that gave much weight to capabilities necessary to function in an anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) environment (The Tokyo Foundation 2011).

Setting up a sufficient and at the same time reliable defence position by Japan, in order that the country secures its territorial waters and airspace, and also the islands in the Asia-Pacific region, was seen to be in line with the rebalance strategy and work well in strengthening the United States potential in trouncing A2/AD-related issues in the western Pacific. One of the constructive instances experienced by following Japan's new rules of engagement was in April 2012 when North Korea declared a campaign over Japan's south-western islands to hit the area with a long-range missile. To this announcement, in order to defend the population against the potential hazard of incoming missiles or debris, the JSDF responded by sending out Patriot-3 batteries and chemical protection units on islands such as Okinawa, Miyako, and Ishigaki as well as Aegis destroyers in the waters encircling those islands. The U.S. forces deployed in Okinawa and the surrounding zones were under cover, it was made available by Japan against ballistic missiles all through the emergency (The National Bureau of Asian Research 2013). The fact remained that the Japan government wanted American military presence in Japan (which the rebalance confirmed) even if the Japanese population, especially in Okinawa, was opposed to the US military presence in the country. This represented the military aspect of rebalance in Japan.

Japan played a critical role in Obama's rebalance policy as an ally. In supporting the strategic plans of the United States, Abe Shinzo's government took longer strides in cementing relations between the two countries. The Japanese government supported the U.S. government in funding aid to Afghanistan. Japan voluntarily earmarked \$3 billion in Afghanistan for promoting self-sufficient environment in the country by supporting efforts such as infrastructure development, agriculture reform as well as human resources training in 2012. Japan's influence in Central Asia was welcome and encouraged by the Obama administration. Japan even assured \$700 million in aid to Central Asia Dialogue partners to concentrate on economic restructuring, social growth, dealings with the global community and the promotion of good governance in 2012. This was also viewed as some sort of a mechanism to counterbalance the power of Russia and China. On the other end of the security spectrum in Asia-Pacific, Japan's cooperation with Russia proved to be noteworthy since Russia still acts as a dominant regional influence. The cooperation between the two regional powers is considered indispensable to prop up development,

fight terrorism and Islamic extremism, and counter drug trafficking. Through all of these efforts, cooperation between Japan and Russia could be well promoted (Miller 2012).

Several scholars have opined that if the relationship between the United States and its allies deteriorate, serious issues might arise which could eventually lead to attrition of the U.S. presence in the Asia and the Pacific in terms of political and military matters. And therefore, it is all the more important for Japan and the United States to strengthen their alliance partnership and work on questions like base repositioning in such cases as in the realignment of the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station in Okinawa. Any movement of forces in the Asia-Pacific would follow the principle "geographically distributed, operationally resilient, and politically sustainable." Instances could be given such as relocation of several marines stationed in Okinawa to Guam and the Marianas; this was decided between the United States and Japan in 2005-2006. Furthermore, another example is the announcement of the deployment of 2,500 marines and airmen at a base in Darwin, Australia. Also, the chunk of U.S. warfare units posted in Okinawa and Hawaii fall under the command of the III Marine Expeditionary Force headquartered in Okinawa. Traditionally, the story has been more centred on the north of the Asia-Pacific. However, the new paradigm put in place a plan where the U.S. Marine Corps were more uniformly disseminated with new stations in Guam and northern Australia. This arrangement made it more efficient for rapid deployment to deal with regional eventualities. The whole idea of relocating troops also had to do with mitigating burden on the allies which would in due course result in reducing political risks (The National Bureau of Asian Research 2013).

As discussed in the previous chapter, Obama administration's rebalancing toward the Asia-Pacific region stimulated misgivings in China both in terms of language and action. These misgivings also intensified when the United States put itself where it could get intertwined in China's clash with Japan over such contentious issues such as the Diaoyu Islands question and the maritime concerns in the South China Sea. Since America's rebalancing was more focused on China, both the United States and Japan, as its regional ally, tried to construct and uphold positive relations with Beijing. However, in April 2014, Obama declared that the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands were covered by Article 5 of the

US-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation, reassuring Japan of Washington's commitment to its treaty with allies in the region (Panda 2014).

The Abe administration wanted to widen Japan's security role to defend the country against both internal threats and external threats/missions. Thus, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was able to reinterpret Article 9 of the constitution in 2015 with the support of parliament to enable Japan's right to "collective self-defence". The Obama administration commended the push in light of the rebalance efforts to strengthen military alliance and presence in the Asia-Pacific region. However, the contentious amendment was met with opposition from the domestic population, South Korea (an important neighbour) and China as well (*BBC* 2017). Furthermore, Prime Minister Abe's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine in 2013 worried the Obama administration for a brief period as the shrine represented pre-1945, fascist and "greater East Asian" picture. However, after drawing much criticism from that visit, Prime Minister Abe learnt his lesson never to repeat the same blunder and increasingly pushed for "positive pacifism" (McCormack 2016).

Some strategic thinkers were also of the view that if the strategy of rebalancing prolonged and the security milieu deteriorated, the possibility of an arms competition could be a foreseeable future in the Asia and the Pacific region. However, in any possible occurrence, Japan put in place its new dynamic defence force concept in 2010 which would perform a dual function of defending the south-western islands as well as assist the United States deployed troops in and around Okinawa in the midst of Japan's defensive envelop. For all of these reasons, the United States and Japan called for such exhaustive chain of dialogues so that there could be better coordination of defence plans and result-oriented actions between the two countries. And in a more positive development, the Obama administration signed an agreement with Japan in December 2015 on a new five-year plan of host nation support for US troops in Japan and also declared an arrangement to accelerate returns to Japan of select base assets in Okinawa. This was expected to help move forward the mutually agreed realignment of US forces in Japan which included the integration of American forces on Okinawa. Both the US and Japan also agreed on an Environmental Framework Agreement which regulates environmental stewardship at US bases (CRS 2016). As mentioned before, Japanese public sentiment that went against the

stationing of American troops in Japan was always a hurdle to the efforts made by Japanese governments to maintain strong ties with the US by agreeing to movement and basing of troops in the country.

The release of the revised U.S.-Japan Defence Guidelines in 2015 was a boost to the alliance partnership of the two countries. The United States and Japan cooperate on a wide range of regional and international matters such as global health environmental and resource protection, development assistance, women's empowerment, North Korea problem, science & technology, people-to-people ties, maritime security, terrorism, pandemic infections, environmental and climate change, human rights, democracy, non-proliferation, economic stability and trade (CRS 2016).

On 27 May 2016, on the 10th tour to Asia, President Obama made a historical visit to the Peace Memorial in Hiroshima and paid tribute to victims of the nuclear attack in 1945, a first by a sitting American President to visit the site. It was an important visit as it showed that the US acknowledged "such harsh history" of "atomic bombings". Prime Minister Abe also stated that both Japan and the US were "opening a new chapter to the reconciliation" of the two countries in an effort to build stronger relations and confidence (Obama and Abe 2016).

During the trip in May 2016, President Obama also took the opportunity to push the TPP forward, despite domestic opposition from those who think the trade deal favors nations exporting to the US. He attended the Group of Seven (G7) Summit as well during the trip. During the course of the meeting, President Obama reiterated the need to "resolve maritime disputes" and enhance "freedom of navigation and over-flight" in the South China Sea. He also emphasized on the need to work on restraining North Korea's nuclear weapon activities with the help of China. All of this was seen as Washington putting in effort to bolster friendship and trust between US and its allies (Office of the Historian 2018; Phipps and Weaver 2016). This represented the diplomatic aspect of the rebalance strategy.

During the Obama administration, in 2014, another significant step taken to bring the two allies closer was the establishment of a trilateral military intelligence sharing agreement

between Japan, South Korea and the US on North Korea. However, a dark chapter in history between Japan and South Korea especially the issue of “comfort women” during the WWII, lack of transparency and coordination between Japan and South Korea, deteriorating security environment in Northeast Asia and low public opinion in South Korea for Japan – all these posed serious challenges to building partnership and forging allies by the Obama administration under the rebalance policy (Jang 2014).

In total, President Obama visited Japan four times during his term in office and in September 2016, on his last trip to Asia as an American president, he was onboard the Air Force One when it landed in Yokota, Japan for few hours for refueling (Office of the Historian, Department of State, 2018).

US – South Korea

During a joint press conference when President Lee Myung Bak of South Korea visited the US, President Obama stated:

“I think it's important to note that we are releasing a joint statement laying out a shared vision for our alliance in the 21st century. Our friendship has often, understandably, focused on security issues, particularly in Northeast Asia. But we're also committed to a sustained strategic partnership with the Republic of Korea on the full range of global challenges that we're facing -- from economic development to our support for democracy and human rights; from nonproliferation to counterterrorism and peacekeeping” (Obama and Myung-Bak 2009).

In November 2009, on his nine-day trip to Asia, President Barack Obama traveled to South Korea where he met with US forces at the Osan Air Base (Barriere 2009). And in 2010, He went again to South Korea to be present for the Group of 20 (G-20) Summit. All of this showed the intensity with which Washington was dealing with rebalance in the Asia and the Pacific region and also the importance of building bilateral relations (Obama 2010, 12 November).

Then again in March 2012, Obama made a trip to Seoul again for the third time to participate in the fifty three countries international Nuclear Security Summit. He also went to the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea, during the 3 day tour where he also took out the time to meet with the American forces stationed there. During

this trip, President Obama reinforced his commitments to give importance to strengthening relations with other countries. This was showcased by the various bilateral talks he had with the then Chinese President Hu Jintao, then Prime Minister of Pakistan Yousuf Raza Gilani and the then President of the host country Lee Myung Bak (Obama and Myung-bak 2012).

As part of the leadership change in various important countries during Obama's time in office as President, conservative Park Geun-hye's election and swearing in as president of the Republic of Korea on February 25, 2013 as the country's first female head of state was an important international event, as it had the potential to shift dynamics in regional politics and security scenario in Asia. The new leadership seemed committed at maintaining the preceding administration's policy of elaborating the US-ROK alliance while attempting at forging or at least improving relations with North Korea. The US also reciprocated the same commitment when President Obama made a stopover in Seoul from 25-26 April 2014, which was later added to the President's itinerary, to reinforce Washington's determination to pursue Rebalance strategy in the Asia-Pacific region (Kim 2014). Seoul found it crucial to invest in recovering and expanding relations with the United States under the Obama administration and at the same time with avoid conflicts with China too. The new president planned to improve relations with China in the long run (Jang 2014).

The fact that the United States and China make up the G2 notion, in a way, shaped Seoul's foreign policy outlook. Park Geun-hye's administration preferred to pay more weight to the US-ROK alliance more than the Sino-ROK alliance, and clarified that the balanced diplomacy approach was less than pragmatic. Park coming to power was a relief for pro-American South Koreans. Nevertheless, Park's demonstration of Chinese language proficiency and repeated visits to China before becoming the President laid some improved diplomatic foundation. As member of the National Assembly, she garnered enough reputation of being a China expert. Regardless of all the hype about South Korea's newly emphasized relationship with Washington, Park's government decided to improve relations with China for better and increased strategic cooperative partnership. Generally speaking, the location of South Korea makes it imperative for the

country to develop a not-so-complicated relationship with China, if not the smoothest of relationships. This is due to the geographical proximity to China, the economic relationship that South Korea shares with China which has been increasing, and China's influence in the United Nations holds such weight that in any possible event relating to North Korean nuclear threat, China can lend support on security matters to Seoul. This was reflected in Park Geun-hye's China landmark four-day trip in June 2013 (Miller 2013).

However, the honeymoon period between China and South Korea started to face the storm, for instance, in 2013, when China created an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea which increased tensions with Seoul even more (Miller 2013), and the sinking of South Korean coastal guard ship by Chinese fishing boats in October 2016 which was another incident which escalated tensions between the two Asian powers (MarEx 2016). The G2 notion also sidelined the importance of Japan in South Korea's foreign policy top list of strategically significant countries in the region. As mentioned before, it was important for the Obama administration under the rebalance policy to bring the allies – Japan and South Korea – together to increase cooperation no matter the challenges. However, it remained a less successful endeavor as public sentiment in South Korea towards Japan was still poor (Miller 2013).

The United States' rebalance policy and the consequent essential changes which were brought about in the Asia and Pacific region faced incredible challenges. As the emergence of China altered the balance of power as well as the structure of the region's security framework, it proved hard to absolutely predict the future or the upshot of the blueprint that would be created by competing contestation between the United States and China. Like any other country, South Korea found it difficult to imagine how it could influence the trajectory of the dynamics between the United States and China and also was worried about the painful process of cooperation in the course of the regional strategic mess, ranging from an all-out conflict to minor bureaucratic disagreements created by strategic suspicion. As for the United States-ROK alliance, which has survived about six decades, entered a new phase with Obama's rebalance policy over the Asia-

Pacific region into place, reaffirming the roles of both the countries administrations' was critical to the whole strategic shift (Cropsey 2014).

With the changes taking place in the Asia-Pacific region, the United States and the ROK had to tread their bilateral path peacefully so that the delicateness of regional balance could be well handled. In light of China's rise which had amplified territorial disputes in the region between Beijing and the neighbouring countries; also shifts in the security equilibrium in the region which moreover included human security concerns; and with the leadership changes in the two Koreas during the Obama administration. Even when President Obama visited South Korea in April 2014, his administration's main aim was to reassure the relationship more than delivering promises amidst the unbalances in the rebalance strategy (Kim 2014).

With regard to making the environment favourable for South Korea to deal with matters peacefully, the prerequisite of having an East Asian regional order which played by the rules of flexibility and adaptability in terms of balance of benefits and rights was desirable. The flexibility and adaptability should not trespass the fundamental framework of regional order but show respect for regional values such as stability, peace, human rights, democracy and liberty; also mechanisms to control and prevent situations from swelling into strategic conflict were ideal. The idea of the United States getting involved in the Asian picture with the ability to understand of the whole picture, as mentioned above, formed one of the most important concerns for South Korea with regards to the engagement. And whenever the issue of the two Koreas came up, the Obama administration remained involved without a comprehensive solution; and the issue of non-proliferation in the Korean Peninsula stayed as a major issue. Any hint of fissile material moving around from North Korea triggered international reaction, and that meant pre-emptive and defensive measures being taken up by both South Korea and the United States. Both the countries were bound to deal with multidimensional questions ranging from modern logic of power to sovereignty (The National Bureau of Asian Research 2013).

US – Australia

The country has been one of the most significant allies of the United States since the Cold War era and continued to play a decisive role within the broad Asia-Pacific framework of the Obama administration. The country became one of the ‘spokes’ in the United States led “hub and spokes” East Asian security system. Alliance partnership between the U.S. and Australia goes a long way back into the past and it can be traced back to the creation of the Pacific Pact in 1950s followed by the formation of the Australia, New Zealand, and U.S. (ANZUS) Security Treaty in 1951. America’s ‘pivot’ to Asia was depicted in Australia as significant, and it got to do with the country’s history and geography (The White House 2011, 9 November).

With the rise of China’s power, this issue became more pressing. The fundamental question motivating current debate in Australia is in what ways the country would gain from China’s economic growth at the same time achieve its own national interests by avoiding any kind of hindrance from rising Chinese assertiveness in the region. Seemingly, several experts used to argue the need for the Asian countries including Australia, in view of the unavoidable American decline in influencing the region, to re-examine the regional alliance systems and take into consideration the inevitable shifting in balance of power by moving away from the American-centred alliance system to a more multi-polar alliance system. The above observation being at one end of the spectrum, on the other end, there exists the notion that as a result of increasing global interaction and economic interdependence between various countries, which includes the United States and China, the probability of increasing cooperation instead of conflict escalation is the broad-spectrum anticipated phenomenon. The afore mentioned debates formed the extremes of other debates on this subject matter, which numerous have termed as the ‘Asian Century’; within which Australia had to hunt its place for its purpose and strategic significance. Given the delicately febrile nature of security system in the Asia-Pacific region with China’s rise, Australia senses the necessity to watchfully deal with both regional and other alliances especially the U.S.-Australia relations. Keeping this in mind, the relationship between the United States and Australia was on the rise and this was viewed as an effort to strengthen American control in the Western Pacific region

where China's rise in power was witnessed and perceived as posing a threat to the region's stability and more importantly American supremacy (Future Directions International 2011; World Economic Forum 2015).

Recent events clearly showed the nature of the ascendancy of states from the Asia-Pacific region which greatly influenced the Obama administration in declaring the announcement to increase the number of American troops in Australia. No matter how much both the administrations in the U.S. and Australia attempted to brush off the idea that the resurgence of relations between the two allies was an act of strategic realignment in order to balance off China's rising power status, both the countries to a certain extent failed to erase speculations about the rebalancing process. The United States was perceived as quickly establishing the former British prison colony, Australia, as its foreign policy anchor for potentially tumultuous times ahead. Such developments and figurative measures recognized the Pacific region as the geopolitical playing field for the coming century. Even in Samuel Huntington's notable book *The Clash of Civilizations*, Australia is illustrated as one amongst a few "torn countries" on the frontiers of the World's civilization (Huntington 1997).

Regarding co-operation between the U.S. and its allies, the allies in the Asia-Pacific region explicitly supports the American stance whenever required. In case of Australia, if the country was asked to join one of the camps (US or China), it would prefer the American camp in the likely future bipolar world, as both the U.S. and Australia are rooted in an apparent kinship of history and culture. Australia still acts as the geopolitically vital cornerstone to the United States, as its leading ally in the Pacific (Kocsis and Nicholson 2012).

One of the reasons why Australia is important is because of the country's strategic location; the country, especially some parts of the country, act as the opening to the vivacious trade and energy routes that join the Indian Ocean to the Pacific, and natural resources such as the natural gas, the oil, the iron ore flows in the course of those trade routes to the whole world. It did not come as a surprise that foreign investment was elevated in the country, which included more than \$100 billion investment from the United States, for the reason that progressively more, these waters became to form the

core of the global economy and a crucial focus of America's escalating engagement in the region, what the Obama administration termed as pivot/rebalance to Asia. The then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said, "We never actually left Asia; we've always been here and been a presence here. We consider ourselves a Pacific power." Clinton even persuaded Australia to strengthen its relations with India through efforts such as Australian-Indian naval vessel exercises; and she even mentioned that the Obama administration was highly enthusiastic to work with the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation as a dialogue partner where Australia chaired during 2013 – 2015 (Department of State 2012).

Then, Secretary Clinton also applauded the fact that the Australian Government supported the strategic publication "Australia in the Asian Century" White Paper which was released in October 2012. The paper's main purpose was to make available a wide range of recommendations for the Australian government as in how to go about with and fine-tune itself to fit in just fine into the changing global economic and strategic scenario (Baker and Brad 2013).

On the political front, the then Prime Minister Julia Gillard mentioned in 2011 that Australia would remain a partner of the United States in the coming years. The rapport that Gillard's government shared with the Obama administration was as sturdy as the predecessor administration, that is, the one John Howard's government had with President Bush' administration (Kocsis and Nicholson 2012).

Among many of the positive developments, Australia, as mentioned before, became a fundamental strategic base for the United States in the Pacific when President Obama addressed the Australian Parliament on 17 November 2011 stating:

"Asia will largely define whether the century ahead will be marked by conflict or cooperation... I have, therefore, made a deliberate and strategic decision that, as a Pacific nation, the US will play a larger and long-term role in shaping this region and its future... in the Asia-Pacific in the 21st century, the United States of America is all in... This is the essence of America's leadership; it is the essence of our partnership" (Obama 2011, 17 November).

He also stated the relevance of the deployment of an additional 2,500 U.S. troops by 2017; these troops were expected to rotate through Darwin and Northern Territory. The

pragmatic case for this trans-Pacific alliance continued to be strong, such changes developed despite suggestions by several scholars who viewed treaties such as ANZUS as outdated, and proposed that Australia should act in response to the shifting balance of power by moving away from old and redundant treaties (Obama 2011, 17 November).

Nonetheless, with the Australian domestic politics going through such changes into developing European-style social democracy, record-low defence expenditure would make way for the U.S. to increase its military assets in Australia. Thus, the two countries saw a long way to go with fate intertwined for years to come (Kocsis and Nicholson 2012).

As discussed above at length, realizing America's meticulous interest in Australia was uncomplicated. Some of the quite obvious reasons why the two nations are close are they share an interconnected heritage, system of language and influential values structure. From the time when the alliance was created between the United States and Australia during World War II, both the countries have fought alongside each other in Korea, Vietnam and Afghanistan. They are also bound jointly by the 1951 Australia, New Zealand and United States Security Treaty (ANZUS) (Obama 2011, 17 November). Australia, as the world knows, has always been an ardent enthusiast of regional multilateralism. It desires to get involved in shaping the new arrival of the Asian order through creation of cooperative institutions.

When one views from the Australian's perspective, the country is strategically and geographically located a lot nearer to Asia. For that reason, joining the U.S. led alliance system in Asia makes more sense as it would integrate an extensive range of stakeholders such as the Philippines, Thailand, the Republic of Korea and Japan. It seemed to be more practical to stick with the U.S. alliance system in case any contention ruptures between Australia's neighbours that would inevitably lead to an amplified possibility of conflict and insecurity, in light of the tensions existing in the region. Also, Australia is the foremost Western country which lies close to China from a geographical point of view, with its enormous immigration and economic investment flowing into Australia. Immigration actually opens up the path into the Asian century for Australia. For the first

time, huge number of population migrated to Australia from China than from any other country (Baker and Brad 2013).

Moreover, China has become one of the countries that have emerged as a significant trading partner with Australia, forming the total amount of about 25 percent of Australian bilateral trade. In the recent years, energy and mineral exports to China consisted of 80 percent of merchandise exports from Australia, this lucidly showed that Australian economic move towards Asia is conceivably foreseeable. Australia's well-known economic dealings with East Asian countries, accredited to the resource rich country's unrivalled exports of resources such as coal and iron ore. Such activities have led to Australia's vigorous involvement in and leadership on a range of regional multilateral alliances. If Asia owns the future, Australia would emerge as a key country to engage with the world (Kocsis and Nicholson 2012).

More than ever, the mounting competition between the United States and China seemed to inevitably dictate Australian strategic thinking all through the forthcoming years. To this, during an official visit to Australia, the then Secretary of State Clinton stressed on the fact that the United States looked forward to the peaceful rise of China, and especially hoped to see the Chinese government open up more and give its people the opportunity to live in a society and enjoy a political system which is more similar to those of the U.S. and Australia. The then secretary also emphasized that Australia as a strategic country in Asia-Pacific region had the responsibility to play a role in the changing dynamics of the region. She also stated that Australia should work with the United States in fulfilling its calling as an effective regional actor, while being cooperative with several other important United States' allies in the region such as Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia with whom the United States was enjoying a deepening relationship (Department of State 2012).

Also when we look at Australia's relationship with China and the U.S., Taiwan figures as an irrefutable factor. Some experts have argued that Australia's existing approach to the U.S.-China-Taiwan Triangle in numerous ways could be seen as a gamut of Australia's long standing endeavour to engage and balance against China. And with China's rapid

rise in terms of economy and military, engagement and balancing became more inevitable instruments that Australia employed towards China (Atkinson 2012).

On his second time visit to Australia in the month of November 2014, for the G-20 summit, while addressing the crowd at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, President Obama said that Asia's security order could not be based on intimidation of small nations by big ones. He talked about the various challenges facing the region and the globe and that the countries must fight together against these challenges. He emphasized on the importance of the Asia-Pacific region and restated America's "pivot" to the Asia-Pacific region that "the United States is and always will be a Pacific power". Australia was also part of the Trans-Pacific Partnership which the Obama administration wanted to use as a geopolitical instrument to carry on in the region to form the rules in the Asia-Pacific region, as against China's regional infrastructures and growing influence (Obama 2014, 15 November).

US – The Philippines

Throughout all the ups and downs, the US-Philippines relations have survived. And both the countries seemed to have resolved to work together as allies keeping in mind existing common threat perceptions (Rosario 2012).

The Philippines acted as a significant part of the rebalance policy towards the Asia-Pacific region. The Philippines and the United States need each other, it's a two-way relationship. The United States required the Philippines as an ally while the Philippines wanted to build its security needs through the alliance to meet its innumerable security challenges. The importance and relevance of the bilateral relationship between the two countries was stressed on and reaffirmed on November 16, 2011 at the 60th Anniversary of the U.S.-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty. At the occasion, both the countries charted out the Manila Declaration which emphasized on the progressing significance of both the countries bilateral relations in working toward the enhancement of "peace, security and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region". This positive development was followed up by the joint statement at the finale of their 2nd Bilateral Strategic Dialogue in Washington, DC on 27 January 2012. During the meeting, both the countries agreed to

work together to strengthen and intensify their relationship by expanding their cooperation in security, defence, commerce, law enforcement, human rights and disaster relief (Department of State 2012, 27 January).

As mentioned before, Manila banked on Washington for security issues. As part of the rapid progress on bilateral matters, another significant meeting was held on April 30, 2012 where the foreign affairs and defence officials of both the countries met together to discuss strategic perceptions on a number of security matters. The Philippines without a doubt wanted and drew attention to the need for the U.S. to assist the Philippines military in strengthening and stabilizing its competence to fight for territorial defence, counter-insurgency, counter-terrorism and nation building. Nation building would mean the U.S. providing the Philippines the needed help in getting access to EDA, increased grants from FMF and also more precedence to IMET (Official Gazette 2012).

President Barack Obama toured for a week to Asia to further tighten the rebalancing of the US foreign policy towards the region in April 2014. During this trip, the US and the Philippines agreed on a ten-year defence pact, a resultant of a “mutual defence treaty” signed over 60 years ago, this evidently signalled America’s assurance to uphold the security of the Philippines. This pact would allow increased presence of US troops in the country. The Chinese understood this move as US encircling its territory. Also, this came right around the time when the Philippines had filed a case with a Hague-tribunal court against China’s claims on the South China Sea (Maresca 2014).

In November 2015, President Obama once again visited the Philippines where he attended the APEC Summit and met with some important world leaders. Obama also announced Washington’s assistance to American allies for the purpose of maintaining security by increasing the capabilities of navies and partnerships in the region, an amount of US \$250 million. He stood on the Philippine Navy flagship Gregorio del Pilar, a frigate which operates around the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea (Obama 2015).

Right before President Obama left office, as the new Filipino President Rodrigo Duterte came into power, relationship between the U.S. and the Philippines chartered through a turbulent period as the new leader moved towards the Chinese side and threatened the

U.S. to pull out of the alliance system. The new Filipino President even asked the Obama administration in 2016 to remove US soldiers from the southern island of Mindanao. The Philippines also declared that Manila would end joint military exercises and naval patrols in the South China Seas with the US. But, all these were more like a threat. But, it was seen as an unstable phase in the U.S.-Philippines relations without major damage. There still existed dilemma created by some groups of people and power which represent the non-democratic front, even in this country as they held out the face of antagonism against democratic processes through demonstrations like in the Philippines. The present President of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte was also criticised by the US on grounds of human rights abuse for killing thousands of drug dealers in anti-drug operations since he took office (Besant 2016).

Bilateral Relations with Other Regional States

Thailand

Thailand has maintained the status of a traditional ally to the United States for a long time. This paper looks into Thailand's perspective on the driving forces at the back of the new strategic policy like Obama administration's rebalance strategy and the strategy's implications for Thailand and the Southeast Asian region. Among the various driving forces behind American rebalance policy, some of the prominent ones were China's rise in Asia affecting the security and economic issues in the expanse and abroad; the Obama administration renewed its engagement in Southeast Asia through various high-level state visits and by means of attending multilateral forums such as the EAS and the ARF; and also Obama administration's interests that shifted towards pumping up trade partnership with Asia which was becoming the hub of economic growth. Bearing in mind the contention between the United States and China, it should be understood that countries such as Thailand, while trying to develop healthy relationships with both the United States and China, also stood the chance of facing situations where they would be required to opt sides or assist one power which might stir up trouble against the other (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2011, 31 March, Serial No. 112 – 15).

Thailand was in the process of developing a tighter relationship with China; China replaced the United States in 2007 and became the second largest trading partner of Thailand. Thailand's trade with China soared up to \$57 billion in 2011 in contrast to trading with the United States which was \$35 billion (The National Bureau of Asian Research 2013).

Politically as well Thailand was doing well with China. Interestingly, China succeeded to impress Thailand by being prompt and able to supply the largest assistance with \$23 million in cash and in-kind aid when the severe floods of 2011 hit Thailand. China did this before the United States or Japan came to Thailand's aid (Chongkittavorn 2012, 17 April 2012). Another article talked about how Thailand perceived it more important to look beyond cold war U.S. alliance and forge a stronger relationship with China (Chongkittavorn 2012, 2 April).

The Obama administration asked if Thailand would allow the U.S. military to use the U-Tapao naval airbase in August and September 2012 for weather research aircraft which formed part of a project called the Southeast Asia Composition, Cloud, and Climate Coupling Regional Study. This naval airbase was built by the United States during the Vietnam War. The proposal became more suspicious to Thailand, even to China because of two reasons: it came approximately around the time when the Pentagon requested permission for the use of the same facility for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) and also at around the same time as Beijing had serious territorial clashes in and around South China Sea with various neighbouring countries of the region (Chongkittavorn 2012, 17 April; Parameswaran 2015).

However, due to Yingluck government's lack of progress and opposition in the Thai parliament, the project went to Singapore. Nevertheless, the 2012 Thailand visit by Obama left behind quite a good impression even on the people of the country. The President's visit was followed by the signing of "2012 Joint Vision Statement for the Thai-U.S. Defense Alliance" between the U.S. Defense Secretary Panetta and Thai Defence Minister. Thus, we observe that bilateral relations were strengthened between the two countries (Hookway and Curran 2012). In another significant development of events, Bangkok was encouraged to consider joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)

by the United States, to which the Thai government approved to think about. However, after the May 2014 coup, there was a setback in the relationship between both the countries. The US had asked Thailand to go back to civilian rule and strengthen its democratic system of governance (Department of State 2015).

Thailand seemed to be acting with caution. The country did not appear to straightforwardly go along with the American grand strategy for the Asia-Pacific, that is, the rebalance policy. And it turned out to be wise for the United States if the Obama administration was more sensitive towards the need of the region, that is, not to generate a situation where the Southeast Asian countries had to choose sides but respect the codes of conduct of the ASEAN.

Indonesia

Indonesia became an important strategic partner of the Obama administration in the Asia and the Pacific region, and the Southeast Asian country is the world's third largest democracy and tenth-largest economy. In November 2010, following President Obama's visit to the country, the US-Indonesia Comprehensive Partnership agreement was inaugurated. Both the countries cooperate in areas such as education, security, maritime, trade, energy, high-level engagement on democracy and civil society. Furthermore, in 2011, President Obama, the first American President to attend the Summit, went to Bali to attend the third ASEAN-US Summit. All of this led to fast track development in US-Indonesia partnership which resulted in the signing of the US-Indonesia Strategic Partnership treaty, which significantly expanded their relations to engage together in regional and global issues (Department of State 2017, 17 January).

Malaysia

Malaysia became a noteworthy partner for the United States in the Asia-Pacific region with its diverse democracy. The April 2014 trip to Asia by President Obama was momentous as it marked the first stopover by a US President in Malaysia in nearly 50 years and both the countries took the opportunity to further their relationship to a Comprehensive Partnership. The US and Malaysia cooperate on a wide range of issues partnership in trade, investment, environmental cooperation, people-to-people relations,

educational and cultural relations, terrorism, maritime security, regional stability and participate frequently in bilateral and multilateral training, exercises, and visits (Department of State 2016, 25 February).

President Obama visited Malaysia once again in 2015 to meet with world leaders and attend the US-Asean and East Asia summits. The 10th East Asia Summit was dominated, yet again, by current issues such as the territorial disputes in the South China Sea and the international fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (Kurlantzick 2015).

Vietnam

President Barack Obama's visit to Vietnam in May 2016, months before retiring from office, was definitely to reinforce its strategic partnership with the country. This move undoubtedly revealed Washington's intentions, to certain extent, to use the improving ties in its political, military and economic competition with Beijing. Obama's 2016 visit marked a historical milestone in US-Vietnam bilateral partnership (Office of the Historian 2018).

During the visit, Obama's administration declared Washington's decision to lift a decades-long ban on US arms sales to Vietnam; while by 2003, limited military collaboration's had already started between the two countries. Over the last two decades or so, Vietnam had opened up to the inflow of capital investment. The result of which is a growing annual US-Vietnam trade which went up from \$450 million to \$45 billion. As most of the Asian countries were reacting to China's growing aggressive behavior, the Vietnamese government also warily viewed strengthened military ties with the American government as an important measure to protect itself from increased military and economic weight of China, which borders Vietnam. Also, the US and Vietnam further deepened their economic relationship as VeitJet reached a landmark \$11.3 billion deal with Boeing, purchasing 100 Boeing's B737 Max 200 aircrafts and another \$3 billion worth of Pratt & Whitney engines (Vu and Lan 2016).

The newly improved partnership between Washington and Hanoi during the rebalance period included the US providing radars, sensors, drones, refurbished US Coast Guard patrol ships and surveillance planes. Also, the Washington clearly stated that it wanted

increased use of Cam Rahn Bay in Vietnam, a modernized deep-sea port on the South China Sea, as part of the quid pro quo for revoking the arms ban. This would give the US Navy more access in the western reaches of the South China Sea (Holmes 2016).

India

When the United States decided to focus its attention towards Asia-Pacific region through the lens of the rebalance policy of the American grand strategic engagement, India became an active player (Suryanarayana 2012). The increasing bilateral strategic partnership between the United States and India testified that Indo-U.S. relations were growing. President Obama proclaimed that his administration would push the country to play a bigger and long-standing function in moulding the region and its future. This aim was pursued by advocating the central principle of close partnership with allies and friends. When Obama visited India for the first time on 8 November 2010 (The Wall Street Journal 2010), in his address to the Indian parliament, he stated:

“For in Asia and around the world, India is not simply emerging; India has already emerged... And it is my firm belief that the relationship between the United States and India—bound by our shared interests and values—will be one of the defining partnerships of the 21st century. This is the partnership I have come here to build. This is the vision that our nations can realize together” (Obama 2010, 8 November).

In the address to the Indian parliament, President Barack Obama went on to say:

“India and the United States can partner in Asia. Today, the United States is once again playing a leadership role in Asia — strengthening old alliances; deepening relationships, as we are doing with China; and we’re reengaging with regional organizations like ASEAN and joining the East Asia summit — organizations in which India is also a partner. Like your neighbors in Southeast Asia, we want India not only to ‘look East’, we want India to ‘engage East’ — because it will increase the security and prosperity of all our nations” (Obama 2010, 8 November).

President Obama also did not miss the opportunity to declare that the United States would rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific region as it is necessary. And when Washington

described the Asia-Pacific, the region was viewed as stretching from South Asia to the Pacific (Department of Defense 2012).

Hillary Clinton even mentioned the significance of this critical region in international politics namely the Indo-Pacific region stating the fact that the United States made it a strategic priority to maintain and uphold India's Look East policy and to promote the rising powerful country to play a more vital role in Asian affairs and organizations, in contributing more widely to the region and its developments (Department of State 2012).

In this 'Indo-Pacific' region, one of the increasingly dynamic relationships has been the Indo-US relations. The Indo-US partnership continues to witness higher pre-eminence on almost all accounts. This is reflected in the political realm, economic front, a number of strategic issues, science and technology, climate change, etc. With India's rise at the global level, when it comes to Asia-Pacific strategy, the United States and India (as an Asia power) share much concern and recent events, during the Obama administration, witnessed greater convergence of interests between the two countries (Price 2015).

There are various factors which come into play when we look at the security and strategic scenario in Asia and Pacific which draws India and the U.S. closer as strategic partners. Some of the visible factors are firstly, Beijing's expansion of strategic influence, India's border issues with China, and the South China Sea issue. The second factor is the escalating vigor and significance of the Indian Ocean at this time in terms of energy resources, power rivalry and international trading routes. Thirdly, other issues that can be broadly clubbed together under the non-traditional security threats in Asia-Pacific, including terrorism and Islamic extremism, drug and human trafficking, natural disasters, etc. These factors can be pointed at as some of the issues that had driven the Americans to renovate and focus on Asia-Pacific once again, while considering India's role seriously (Panda 2012). India, a natural partner of the U.S., was taken into account seriously by the Obama administration in areas of regional development like the Integrated Ocean Drilling Programme led by both the United States and Japan, which further led to expanding the idea of cooperation on an Asia-Pacific regional scale.

It is vital to note that when Washington was confronted by issues such as North Korea, Iran, terrorism, energy, climate and Afghanistan in Asia-Pacific region, India stood out to be one of the leading unannounced allies with effective power and influence in the region. Also, both the countries happened to renew their strategic interests in the region around the same time. India had been taking up initiatives to look towards the east for cooperation at various levels on various challenging global and regional issues-traditional and non-traditional issues, such as renewing its bilateral military exercises with Southeast Asian states such as Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines. Thus, India's closer partnerships with Japan, Southeast Asian countries could sideline China's growing influence to certain extent and this coincided with the US strategic interest in the Asia and Pacific region to balance and contain Beijing's mounting power. However, any sort of understanding and development of relationship between the rising powers such as India, China and Russia for instance through BRICS, etc was seen as a strategy that could pose a challenge to America's interest in the region Asia-Pacific region. Thus, the Obama administration called the India relations with the US "one of the defining partnerships of the 21st century" (*Hindustan Times* 2010).

However, in all of this, India which has always had problems with China – with border issues, growing Sino-Pak relations, etc – turned out to be a natural choice for the United States in furthering America's strategic interests in the region. The other prominent allies such as Japan and Australia already confirmed their allegiance to Washington. Therefore, the anti-China notion happened to bind countries in the Asia and Pacific region favoring the Obama administration in achieving its desired goal of formulating plans for the region. And India appeared to fit in perfectly fine (Panda 2012).

However, under the Modi government, the US-India relationship saw a drastic change and development whereby both the countries witnessed a closer relation as inevitable global partners and strong democracies. In January 2015, President Barack Obama was invited by Prime Minister Modi. President Obama became the first sitting American President to visit India twice and also the first American President to attend India's Republic Day parade as the chief guest. This was a move forward whereby both the countries were able to reach agreements on stalled discussions on civil nuclear

cooperation. The US and India signed important defence strategic agreements, among other agreements, which included the renewal of a ten-year-old defence strategic framework (Somanader 2015).

Taiwan

The relationship between the US and Taiwan is a unique one in which it is a vigorous but an unofficial one. And the US is the biggest ally of the country, even if it suffered severe upheavals from time to time. During one of the interactions between the then U.S. National Security Adviser General James Jones and President Ma Ying-jeou on 22 June 2012, the Taiwanese President stated:

“The U.S. has consistently been an important force for stability in Asia.... Taiwan not only welcomes this [rebalancing] development, but also desires to further strengthen its interaction with the United States on the economic, trade, security and cultural fronts” [Office of the President, Republic of China (Taiwan) 2012].

For some experts on Taiwan, the Obama administration’s rebalance policy was similar to a trident consisting three spikes of multilateral diplomacy, trade promotion and military redeployment. In terms of diplomatic efforts, the United States was occupied with upbeat involvement in regional multilateral economic and security meetings while at the same time boosting and revitalizing bilateral relations with new and old friends in the region. When it came to the economic realm, the Obama administration went on pumping up much by heightening its participation in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and furthermore, the administration announced to work with and endorse the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) to which Taiwan vowed to strive in the following eight to ten years to fulfill all the prerequisites for joining the TPP. This venture had the potential to form the leading and largest liberalized free trade zone globally. Using this opportunity, it was suggested that Taiwan should go all-out to advance in its effort to liberalize its market and perk up the country’s investment environment. Lastly but not the least, when it came to security matters, the United States had always been there as Taiwan’s virtual protector, even if both the countries are not formally allies; and Taiwan also looked at rebalance policy as a rebalancing act of the United States toward the Beijing government.

With Obama administration's decision to create the air-sea battle model, along with the repositioning of U.S. troops in the region, the security front seemed to protect and not overlook the Asia and Pacific expanse (The National Bureau of Asian Research 2013).

Like most other countries in the Asia-Pacific, Taipei welcomed and paid close attention to the escalating involvement of the United States in the region. The country also looked at U.S. engagement as a constructive advancement which allowed the United States to grow itself as well as nurture the bilateral relations between the United States and Taiwan (The National Bureau of Asian Research 2013).

Taiwan has unique relations with countries such as Australia and Japan; these two countries are the only two allies of the United States that could plausibly help it in protecting Taiwan from a Chinese assault. The US also supports Taiwan in being part of international or regional organizations where statehood is not mandatory for membership. Taiwan is a member of the APEC forum and the Asian Development Bank (Department of State 2016, 13 September).

However, emphasizing on the One-China policy, President Obama affirmed saying:

“Given how much is at stake in terms of the world economy, national security, our presence in the Asia-Pacific, China's increasing role in international affairs – there's probably no bilateral relationship that carries more significance... For China, the issue of Taiwan is as important as anything on their docket... This goes to the core of how they see themselves. And their reaction on this particular issue could be significant” (The White House 2016, 16 December).

Burma

One of the most important political developments in the Southeast Asian region during the Obama administration was Burma's opening up, steady democratic transitioning and political liberalization through a slow but continues process. Officials in Washington believed that it was one of the most successful outcomes of Obama Administration's rebalancing policy. This political improvement was highly encouraged by the American government which was exemplified in the then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's visit in November 2011, which was a first in the history of US-Burma relationship (Quinn

2011). This was followed by eventual official visit by President Barack Obama to the Southeast Asian country in late 2012 which exemplified Obama administration's commitment to support Burma's willingness to reform its political system into a democratic one (Beech 2012). President Obama, after the bilateral meeting, stated,

“We think that a process of democratic reform and economic reform here in Myanmar that has been begun by the President is one that can lead to incredible development opportunities here. And we are committed to continuing to work very hard to try to strengthen the bilateral relationship so that we can promote progress that will be good not only for this country but for the region and for the international community” (Obama and Sein 2012).

The reciprocal visit by President Thein Sein to the United States in 2013 was a significant development as it was the first visit by a leader from Burma in almost fifty years. The politically progressive move made by Burma was claimed by several experts as an intentional choice the country made in moving closer to the US and a shifting away from the traditionally excessive reliance on China (The White House 2013, 20 May).

Thus, then Secretary Hillary Clinton visit to the country in 2011, President Obama's 2012 and 2014 visits, and President Thein Sein travel to Washington in May 2013 were proofs of the change in relations. Burma started focussing on bringing about liberalization and democratic reforms in the country (Xu and Albert 2016).

In November 2014, President Obama visited Burma for the second time to take part in the East Asia Summit. Obama also attended a US-ASEAN session and a Young South-east Asian Leaders Initiative meeting (Office of the Historian, Department of State 2018).

The Obama administration encouraged Burma towards becoming a democratic country by pursuing national reconciliation, strengthen government institutions, transparency and accountability, promote freedom of religion and respect for human rights, emancipate civil societies and the role of local communities, and also encourage the Burmese government to increase its regional and international engagements. On 4 April 2012, under the Obama administration, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Mission also re-established its engagement with Burma. Washington continued to

provide humanitarian assistance to Burma through its various agencies such as Department of State, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Labor, Department of Defense, Department of Commerce, U.S. Trade and Development Agency among others. As Burma continued to progress, the U.S. lifted the national emergency towards Burma in October 2016. This step removed various economic and financial sanctions on Burma that were in place from 1997. Thus, steps were taken by the Obama administration under the rebalance policy to help Burma move towards a stronger and more stable democratic country (Department of State 2017, 27 January).

Singapore

In 2009, President Obama visited Singapore to attend the APEC Summit and it was the first time a sitting American President met all the ten members of ASEAN in a groundbreaking meeting. The US and Singapore have cooperative relationship in areas such as education, economic, political and security matters. In 2012, the two countries held the first meeting of a Strategic Partnership Dialogue which was then followed by a ministerial meeting. Through this meeting, new mechanisms were established for both the countries to partner and cooperate in the Asia and the Pacific region. A Third Country Technical Program (TCTP) was also introduced, which is a joint technical assistance program for developing countries (Department of State 2016, 22 January).

Cambodia

In November 2012, President Barack Obama visited Cambodia, a first visit by an American President. Obama was present for the East Asian Summit in Phnom Penh, which was largely dominated by South China Sea issue. The Obama administration was assisting the Southeast nation in fighting various challenges such developing its democratic institutions, human rights issues, global health and development, human trafficking, corruption, environmental and natural resources management and convict the criminals of 1975-79 Khmer Rouge regime (Department of State 2016, 12 February).

Multilateral Cooperation

An enhanced understanding of America's operational relationships in Asia within the framework of its shifting priorities and geopolitical realities had the capability to inform the potential course of American strategic stance in the region. Also one of the latent benefits for U.S. involvement in the regional institutions was to build confidence among the Asian countries, who had been irritated by perceived inadequate commitment of the U.S. in the multilateral organizations (CSIS 2009).

Obama's rebalance policy, without a doubt, focused profoundly on China. However, the policy also highly concentrated on the 10-member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). These countries have to live with the dragon as the rising power around their borders. When it comes to Southeast Asia, rebalance policy applied the best as it focused on protecting and strengthening the region's security, economic and democratic situation (Emmerson 2012).

When we look at the sub-regions of Asia-Pacific and U.S. involvement, it was evident that the U.S., under the Obama administration, made efforts to improve its involvement in the regional structures. In the Southeast Asia region, de facto American security agreements offered the region's enthusiasm to support and encourage a stronger diplomatic and economic framework, with China's growing power in the backdrop. It was also observed that U.S. unilateralist strategies were carried out with a view to defending the freedom of the high seas and also assuring the continued commitment of the American military presence in Southeast Asia. American hegemonic bend seemed to be quite modest in this area and was actually controlled by the consecutive presence of China. The relative weakness of the Southeast Asian countries was witnessed in its strategic reach which was restricted, as exemplified by the incapacity of countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia to even maintain efficient control of the territories and waters contained within their jurisdiction. So far, ASEAN has been the regional organization which has been able to maintain unity on such conflicts of interest disturbing all of Southeast Asia (Emmerson 2012).

When it comes to engaging with regional structures, Obama's administration reached out to ASEAN countries. In 2009, Obama declared a joint statement after a meeting with the ASEAN leaders which "reaffirmed the importance of ASEAN centrality" in the process of building a regional security architecture "that is inclusive, promote shared values and norms, and respects the diversity of the region ." The Obama administration completely endorsed ASEAN and this was repeatedly mentioned by the then Secretary Hillary Clinton. Also the ARF (ASEAN Regional Forum) was looked at as an important forum to develop confidence building measures between the U.S. and the region (Department of State 2010, 28 October).

As a good gesture and part of the first official trip, the then State Secretary Hillary Clinton visited Indonesia and ASEAN Secretariat in 2009 and the Obama administration proclaimed that it wanted stronger relations with ASEAN. Then, in July 2009, Secretary Clinton took part in the ASEAN Regional Forum which was followed by the signing of the 2009 resolution of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) with ASEAN which marked the beginning of a huge step forward. The Obama administration followed a number of policies that helped intensify America's involvement in the regional organisations of Asia-Pacific. After various summit meetings, the United States recognized and joined the East Asia Summit (EAS). The EAS effectively served as the meeting point for two significant multilateral security meetings: the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus which was first convened in October 2010 and the six-party talks. Obama eventually was present in the EAS Summit in Jakarta in 2011 (The National Bureau of Asian Research 2011). Washington seemed to find ways to assist ASEAN including helping the regional organisation financially through Economic Support Fund (ESF); and it also looked into ways to fund programs related to disaster preparedness under the ASEAN regional forum (CRS 2012).

It was suggested that ASEAN should build itself up more strong and exploit its latent ability to become a forum where the major powers in the region could interact and continue to work together with the United States. They attempted to work towards developing a "culture of restraint and enhance the mechanisms of cooperation in the

Asia-Pacific, continued peace, stability, and prosperity in the region will obtain” (The National Bureau of Asian Research 2011).

This constructive improvement was followed by Obama’s inaugural presence at the EAS meeting held in Indonesia in November 2011. Showing the unrelenting support and engagement in the strategic and economic realm in the Asia and Pacific region, President Obama attended the East Asia Summit which was held in Phnom Penh on 20 November 2012. The United States obviously focussed on augmenting cooperation with other countries of the region to work together on the region’s gravest issues including energy, maritime security, non-proliferation, humanitarian assistance and disaster response. Obama clearly specified and explained his administration’s interest and purpose of engagement in the region’s multilateral structural design. He pointed out that such commitment would facilitate reinforcement of “system of rules, norms, and responsibilities, including respect for universal human rights and fundamental freedoms that are essential to regional peace, stability, and prosperity” (The White House 2012, 20 November).

Obama continued to make efforts to foster relationships through important regional organization in the Asia-Pacific region. For instance, Obama attended the November 2014 APEC Leaders Meeting in China, US-ASEAN session and East Asia Summit in Myanmar in 2014, the APEC Summit in the Philippines in November 2015 and US-ASEAN and East Asia Summits in Malaysia in November 2015. And in the month of September, President Obama visited China from 3-5 September to attend the G-20 summit (*The New York Times* 2016, 3 September). Following this, President Obama went on to visit Laos from 5-9 September 2016 to attend the East Asia Summit as part of his last trip to the Southeast Asian region (Office of the Historian, Department of State 2018).

The United States had sought for regional cooperation on matters such as nuclear non-proliferation, disaster preparedness, and regional agreements on trade facilitation initiatives through APEC. According to the CRS Report, the Obama administration could be observed pursuing economic and trade agreements with the countries in the Asia-Pacific region, even through TPP agreement, excluding China. For instance, four out of

ten rising export markets targeted in the 2011 National Export strategy, which were China, India, Indonesia and Vietnam, were nations of the Asia-Pacific region. The administration decision to settle South Korea-U.S. FTA and even the TPP represent America's FTA policy in Asia (CRS 2012).

During the APEC Summit in November 2011, Obama pushed for the TTP in which 9 APEC countries were involved, however, without China showing interest in joining the Trans-Pacific free trade zone. The Obama administration used the regional forums to push for TPP which the administration saw as a potential springboard for speeding up free trade flow in the Asia-Pacific region. China after realizing Obama administration's move to create a US-led regional organization, it reacted by pushing for an Asian security concept which was not a US-led regional structure, for instance, by launching of a \$50 billion Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Even if China did not join the TPP talks, it gave its consent to back any long term negotiation for a free trade area in the region (*BBC News Asia* 2011). Whether China launched a new regional institution or not, TPP still needed to be successful in order to join forces with US allies, partners and even foes for American interests to be achieved (Lawrence, Leggett and Morrison 2014). The Obama administration, however, could not get the TPP agreement go through the Congress.

Obama administration also launched the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) to foster ties and enhance people-to-people relationships between the United States and the Southeast Asian region and cultivate human resources in the region for stability and prosperity (The White House 2015, 21 November).

Alliance Diplomacy

Alliance partnership between the U.S., Australia and New Zealand could be traced back to the creation of the Pacific Pact in 1950s followed by the formation of the Australia, New Zealand, and U.S. (ANZUS) Security Treaty in 1951. After the WWII, these countries became part of the 'spokes' in the United States led "hub and spokes" East Asian security system. The rebalance policy to Asia became significant to Australia as it could benefit from it for its defence and security. Australia's relationship with the US has historical and geographical importance (The White House 2011, 9 November).

Under the treaty, the parties “agreed to consult in case of an attack in the Pacific and to ‘act to meet the common danger’”. Unlike Australia, New Zealand proposed nuclear free zone in 1980s wherein nuclear-armed and nuclear-powered warships were not allowed to enter its ports. This move thwarted “practical alliance cooperation under ANZUS”. And thus, the US pull out from its “security obligations” under ANZUS towards New Zealand. However, relations between the US and New Zealand started improving in the last decade. Agreement such as Wellington Declaration was signed in 2010 to explore areas of cooperation, and then, the Washington Declaration in 2012 for enhanced defence and strategic cooperation. After more than three decades, the destroyer USS Sampson visited New Zealand in November 2016 (Department of State 2017, 14 February).

In the 1980s as New Zealand exited ANZUS, the US and Australia started meeting under Australia–US Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN) arrangement. In this forum, bilateral consultations between the US and Australia are held annually, alternating between the US and Australia. In these consultations, Australian Ministers for Foreign Affairs and Defence meet with the US Secretaries of State and Defense. They are joined by senior officials from both portfolios. In this forum, the US and Australia engage “to discuss and share perspectives and approaches on major global and regional political issues, and to deepen bilateral foreign security and defence cooperation”. Both the countries also committed to engage and support regional dialogues through East Asia Summit, ASEAN, Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC), G20 and TPP under the alliance system banner. In these forums, both the US and Australia wanted to address regional security issues such as East and South China seas disputes and the Korean crisis among others. Both the countries also realized the need to cooperate and align their strategic goals to engage and restrain China’s ambitions, however, by avoiding escalation of tensions and conflicts (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2012; Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2015).

Foe/Competitor Countries

China

As discussed in the earlier chapter, East Asia is swiftly changing, mostly due to the rise of China which is stimulated by the country's striking economic growth, followed by the other powers of Asia. China's new economic boom has given the country fresh power and renewed influence in the region, which is one of the reasons why America's interest in the region was boosted. Nevertheless, a number of Asia-Pacific analysts and observers, both in Asia-Pacific and in the United States, also believed that the United States had been preoccupied in West Asia and because of that Washington might not have given enough focus on the 'Asia-Pacific' question at a significant point in the realization of what may turn out to be a fresh era in Asia. At present, China poses the capacity of being the only power that is capable of becoming a close competitor of the United States. During the initial years of Obama administration, policy makers in Washington believed that forming a strategy that would prevent the possibility of China's rise is less peaceful, and cooperation would rather be a cautious course of action (Department of State 2009, 26 February). However, as Chinese aggressiveness grew stronger, Obama administration started realizing that it needed to be more cautious of China (Department of Defense 2012, 3 January).

Jin Canrong, Deputy Dean at School of International Studies, Renmin University of China, argued:

“Behind the US adjusting its global strategy to return to the Asia-Pacific is the rise of China: within a space of three years, China held three high-profile events—the Olympic Games in 2008, the military parade in 2009 and the World Expo in 2010. Moreover, in 2010 China surpassed Japan to become the world's second largest economy, and overtook the US in manufacturing output and power generation” (Canrong 2016).

In the effort to engage China or as some would call “encircling China”, the present researcher observes that the United States meets the criteria to be an overriding power, while China is a rising power that has elements of structural power. When focussed,

specifically, on East Asia while discussing about the ‘Asian Century’, the enticement is to examine events as binary competition between the United States and China, which is becoming a fast competitor of the United States. This can be a narrow view, however, with some truth in it. The relationship between Washington and Beijing can be categorised under two types. One goes toward the need for cooperation and the other points toward possible confrontation.

According to Susan L. Shirk, an American expert on Chinese politics:

“On one hand, China’s success, and the leaders’ own power, depends on cooperation with the United States. If the United States declared China the enemy in a new Cold War and tried to tie an economic noose around it, China’s economic growth and job creation would be slowed and domestic problems would mount” (Shirk 2007: 219).

This unmistakably explains Beijing’s difficulty of facing a troubling paradox. This would mean that cooperation is a must. The more developed and prosperous China becomes, the more insecure and threatened it might feel (Shirk 2007).

Discussing the American role in China’s rise is gaining attention in the strategic world more than ever and therefore, Walt explained the trend in the strategic realm in the Asia and Pacific region which revealed numerous developments: first of all, the European security status does not seem to need U.S. help like the security scenario in Asia which calls for U.S. protection. Second, the war efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan proved to be huge disappointments where thousands of U.S. troops had been sent to accomplish ‘nation-building’ effort with little success or no success at all. Third, Asia’s booming economic rise captivated the U.S. administrations. Lastly, but not the least, the trendy notion, within the strategic dominion, of China’s growth and increasing influence and occasional arrogance which caught the attention of the United States and other states in and around the region to counterbalance the phenomenon. He continued to assert that the U.S. strategic move toward Asia under the Obama administration was indispensable given that China’s rise in power called for a counterbalancing act from the United States and others, which could also annoy China leading to a new Cold War (Walt 2011).

As mentioned before, Walt went on to quote George F. Kennan's book 'American Diplomacy' where Kennan shared his view point of the cold war era where a number of key centres of industrial power were present in these regions of the world such as in Western Europe, Japan, the Soviet Union and the United States. During which time, the most central objective of the American government was to make sure Soviet Union stayed away from grabbing those centres of power that were positioned outside its clutch. This was clearly containment, now China is seen as attempting to take erstwhile USSR's place. He also argued that Washington's moves should be well inspired and guided by wide-ranging diplomatic engagements with China and American Asian partners. This would be the most appropriate way to go about in order to guarantee that Beijing is not disproportionately alarmed, and also to make sure that US allies do not free-ride on it (Walt 2011).

The Obama administration paid heed to this idea which was very well reflected in the way President Obama, starting from the beginning of his first term, reached out to the Asian countries through his tours to the region, especially China, as he tried to understand the country's political and strategic heartbeat. Right after he got elected to office, President Obama visited Japan, South Korea, China and Singapore in November 2009, in an act of pursuing a new era of reviving, strengthening and exploring relationships through engagement and cooperation with countries in the Asia-Pacific region (McMahon and Zeiler eds. 2012).

President Obama sought Beijing's cooperation on many issues such as climate change, economic stability during his longest maiden trip to China. Furthermore, Washington hosted the first US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue in July 2009 in an attempt to increase understanding and cooperation between both the powers. All of this reflected the new reality in Asian politics where China's economic growth and political-strategic influence in the region inevitably led to China having increasing dominance over economic interdependence in the region. And if the US wanted to play its destined leadership role in the region, then, it had to engage with China by building new partnerships and walk the middle path by avoiding the urge to contain China. President

Obama's efforts to build a stronger diplomatic bridge between the US and China was certainly visible (Obama 2009, 27 July).

The joint conference, though, saw both the leaders reading out cautiously scripted speeches during his visit to China in 2009 and no questions were fielded. Obama also held a "town hall" meeting in Shanghai; however, the Chinese government placed broadcasting restrictions on it. To protect American political, economic and security interest in the Asia and the Pacific region, Washington had to play a leading role by forging its ties with its allies, building new partnerships and strengthen the capacity of regional organisations. It was evident that containment of China by the US was possible but it would come at a cost (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2010, 21 January, S. HRG. 111-708).

Rebalance policy was, essentially, cooperation and hedging China, both at the same time. Lim, who is an Assistant Professor at Fujen Catholic University in Taiwan, was also of the view that in planning and studying the post-Cold War scenario in international politics, one of the most high-up questions points toward the probable effects of China's rise. He continued to argue that the U.S.-Sino relation was manoeuvring its way towards confrontation rather than co-operation. Several Chinese strategic thinkers put forward the fact that even if China followed the path of cooperation, Washington fixed a number of objectives which were meant to hem-in China's growth by sending military deployments to the region and making treaty commitments with allies and partners, and thus, preventing it from playing its historic role as the middle kingdom (Lim 2010).

Consequently, the notion of U.S. impeding China's chance to rise as a global power made China believe that any substantial cooperation with the U.S. had become self-defeating since it would only serve the overriding U.S. objective to neutralize China. In Toto, however, power transition theory's assumptions would echo more or less unequivocally suggesting that the swift and all-round rise of China gave the impression of a likely overhauling of the American prevailing power by the rising contender. Cynics, nevertheless, pointed out that the United States is far ahead of China by most standards. Lim continued to emphasize that despite the fact that a global power transition seemed to

remain far from reach; the appropriate stage at which the transition should be registered was the East Asian region or the Asian 'super-region' (Lim 2010).

Other Chinese strategic thinkers were of the view that the Obama administration was using its superior power to intensify its 'security rebalancing' efforts on China with the help of its allies. Washington, at the same time, continued to infiltrate in the regional structure by providing humanitarian aid, carrying out arms deals and military exchanges. And in doing so, cooperation and trust between the two countries were harmed. The relationship could be termed 'neither friend nor foe' relationship. In addition to the above statement, China's national interests was threatened by the American policies in cases such as Taiwan Unification, U.S. security deployment in Asia and human rights (Yuan and Xin 2011).

However, Shen Dingli, Professor of International Studies in Institute of International Studies, Fudan University, concluded that, in light of the recent developments, the United States and China shared an intricate relationship. Being faced with common threats which include nuclear missile proliferation and regional stability, the two countries were striving toward finding areas where they could join forces. However, both the countries tended to generate negative security sensitivities from time to time. For America, it is China's nuclear defence system, anti-satellite (ASAT) programs and also increasingly assertive stance on territorial disputes with South-East Asian countries in the South China Sea, and, farther north, with Japan, which was troublesome and degenerated mutual trust between them. While on the other hand, China felt that it was American interference in regional affairs which appeared to be irritating. US diplomatic shifts in the Asia-Pacific region during the Obama's first term were perceived by China's offensive realists as a premeditated challenge, demonstrating a "grand strategy" steered by offensive realists on the other side (Dingli 2011). The new active engagement in the region, which several US diplomats maintained as a revitalization of interest but not to be seen as a 'return' to the region, could not afford to be a disordered or unstable one.

In light of existing problems, Tüefel Dreyer, who is a Senior Fellow in Foreign Policy Research Institute's Asia Program, complained that China and the United States had been doing the talking ever since the normalisation process began. Nevertheless, on bigger

issues which include trade, military, Taiwan and North Korea, substantial frictions were to be avoided. As a consequence, since it seemed consistent with Mearsheimer's claim that China would aspire to regional hegemony and be a challenger to U.S. security interests in East Asia, it became necessary for the U.S. to start preparing for the eventuality and enact policies of containment of China before it was too late (Moore 2011).

Scholars warned that the present situation and conditions of the international system warranted conflict as China wishes to climb up the hegemonic-power ladder and become a regional hegemonic power in Asia-Pacific region by attempting to force the U.S. out of its area of influence (Mearsheimer 2010). That said, it was unsure which path Sino-U.S. interactions was going to take in the end. Writing in *International Security*, a Harvard journal, Professor Randall Schweller and Xiaoyu Pu argued that the relations could be put under different categories. First, there was a possibility where China could be a spoiler to substitute U.S. hegemony. Second was that the US and China had the option to act in concert (under the proposed G-2). Third, China was also presumed to become a shirker wherein it would try to reap as much gains as it could under American hegemony before it attempted to form a world order on its own terms (Schweller and Pu 2011).

To America's credit, several Asian countries were looking up to America's leadership in the region. Also threatened by North Korean aggression, Japan mulled over securing its own nuclear arsenal. Australia signed an agreement to host U.S. forces on Australian soil. According to analysts, Singapore became a quasi-ally to the U.S. but cultivated strong ties to China (Choong 2011).

Chinese perception of Obama's rebalance strategic framework as "Strategic Encirclement" collided with its regional hegemonic rise, since the beginning of 1990s, accompanied by rapidly expanding military might including long-range power projection in the regional conflicting spots especially East and South China Seas where, as Americans would claim, American naval power never left since the end of the second world war. U.S. including its allies in Asia and Europe also started realizing the need for

a renewed strategy in the Asia and Pacific region and to direct Pentagon to prioritize and shift a good amount of its focus and resources to the region. This question became increasingly distressing in the wake of potential and escalating tension over the disputed islands such as Senkaku Islands, Paracel Islands, Spratly Islands, and zones of influence which could possibly lead to perilous armed conflict jeopardizing global trade routes and stability in the region and the world. Layne wrote on hegemonic challenges, titled “China’s Challenge to US Hegemony” released in 2008, pointing out that China’s rise would be undoubtedly marked with geopolitical turmoil, but a full-fledged war between the U.S. and China was not unavoidable. “Engagement and containment are “ideal type” grand strategies toward China.” And when it comes to off-shore balancing strategy, Washington would be relying more on its allies such as Japan, India, etc that would depend on a balance-of-power dynamic (Layne 2008).

These rising countries might not want to see China rising aggressively faster than them. And it is worth mentioning that Robert Koehane, a neoliberal institutionalist, argued that throughout this crisis, commercial and financial interdependence could still work (Koehane 2005). Building strong political-diplomatic environment seemed to be a wise choice, against the backdrop of China’s rise and tensions rising in the region.

East Asia has become the world’s fastest growing region, not just in economic realm but also militarily. And so without any hesitation Kaufman explicitly claimed to be in the group of proponents who concur with the idea that the Chinese regime has hegemonic ambitions going all-out to displace the United States as a paramount power in Asia. Keeping this in mind, Kaufman suggested that the United States should deal with China by developing a mixed strategy of engagement in economic realm but watchfully contain the military power and advancement of China. This might make America feel managing the rise of China was the most daunting long-term challenge it faced in the region. In the meantime, Japan and India happened to be the two most significant counterweights to Chinese power in Asia supported by the United States. But, being deficient in resources and political will to balance China alone, both the countries required the United States to take the lead (Kaufman 2010).

The situation in the region captured more attention since China is rapidly growing its military modernisation in the realms of anti-access and sea denial competences. And also when it came to the space and cyber spheres, the Chinese continued to create issues of anxiety for the Defence wing of the Obama administration (Department of Defense 2012).

Also the U.S.-Japan alliance was focused on fighting against modern-regional threats, especially, the aggressive and swift growth of Chinese military, and its increasing assertiveness in territorial disputes with the concerned Asian countries including Japan (Slavin and Carroll 2014). Therefore, the need for stronger push for institutionalized efforts toward cooperation and engagement from the Obama administration's side was imperative.

When we look at Washington's dependence on its allies for support in maintaining balance in Asia-Pacific, some analysts in "The United States in the New Asia", suggested that the U.S. was dreading the fact that, over the last few years, growing regional diplomatic dialogues and economic structures were headed in the direction where it seemed like they would possibly keep out the United States, as China became one of the most ardent supporters of regional diplomatic relations and free trade agreements. In light of this fact, America's use of 'hub and spokes' method (the United States as the hub, the spokes as the bilateral alliances and the multilateral institutions along the margins of the U.S. policy) in approaching the regional strategic framework became untenable. Instead, it was suggested that the United States should aim to adapt to the already existing regional security framework in the Asia and Pacific region so as to engage in shaping the bilateral and multilateral trends in the region. The Asians like to abide by the already existing rules when it comes to engaging with bilateral and multilateral institutions (Feigenbaum and Manning 2009).

Huge White, a professor of Strategic Studies at the Australian National University, has argued that, to a certain extent, the advantages the U.S. thought it enjoyed as a paramount power were, if not completely misleading, then at least illusory. American supremacy could be controlled and reduced by the risk of escalation. For illustration, the American government's capability to defend Taiwan from any potential Chinese invasion or even to

support the Philippines or Vietnam in any potential conflict with China in the South China Sea would be dictated by its readiness to witness the conflicts get blown out of proportion into wars involving the superpowers or even nuclear confrontations. For that very reason, White suggested that the best solution would be to call for “concert” of Asia’s great powers such as the United States, China, India and Japan. He said that at a point such as this, these powers must agree not to look for primacy, but to go against any member that attempts to do so. Taking a step like this would mean yielding to China a “sphere of influence” (for instance, in Indo-china). The suggestion seemed incredible; however, the domestic and international political obstacles in all four countries seemed to pose problems and most importantly, problems were speculated to crop-up with regards to handling instruments within the concert itself. White’s suggestions were controversial nevertheless he was not alone in considering Sino-American power-sharing (White 2012).

White does not seem to be alone in suggesting Sino-American power and responsibility sharing. Henry A. Kissinger also prescribed that China and the United States could achieve more through co-operation rather than creating a conflicting environment. He suggested that U.S. should welcome China’s global participation and prosperity and China should, moreover, encourage U.S. regional presence especially in Asia-Pacific (Kissinger 2011). Positive strategic venture between China and U.S. would provide a firm foundation for cooperation between the two countries. In all of this, working towards building strategic mutual trust and increasing mutual understanding was a requirement (Jianfei 2009).

Bonnie S. Glaser, a senior adviser for Asia and the director of the China Power Project at CSIS, points out saying:

“... Steps will be required to retain an overall cooperative relationship with China. To tamp down Chinese suspicions that the United States seeks to strategically encircle and contain it, anti-China rhetoric that has needlessly provoked Chinese ire and fears must be jettisoned” (Glaser 2012: 24).

And China believed that Washington was employing “democratic peace theory” to destabilize and challenge countries with different political systems the U.S. rejects and dominate (*The China Daily* 2013). Even if President Obama welcomed the rise of a stable and prosperous China (Biden Jr. 2011), there still remained a big “identity gap” (Rozman 2013). And therefore, filling the identity gap was inevitable through various confidence building and diplomatic measures, even with assistance from its (America’s) allies and partners.

America’s domestic political concerns being another topic of discussion, in the initial years of the administration, some senior officials in the Obama administration repeatedly stated their support for growing powers such as China, India and others, and to pursue cooperation. Echoing this sentiment, Jeffrey Bader, the then senior Director for Asian Affairs on the National Security Council in the Obama Administration, opined that the United States and China could join hands and work in concert to resolve perilous issues and conflicts across the world. And these efforts could lead to laying the foundations for constructing a “new type of great power relationship”. However, according to this new power relationship, there were certain elements that could be responsible for cooperation or conflict such as building bilateral economic relations; international issues where the United States and China might have uneven influence due to their power capacity, for instance, climate change; political and security contest in the Asia-Pacific region between Beijing’ military capabilities and Washington’s rebalancing efforts; and both the countries’ attempts at resolving issues in the third world countries – so called “hot spots” (Bader 2013).

David M. Lampton tried to put forward the argument that the benefits of active engagement were bigger than containment. He said that with the rise of new power centres and also due to the problems which were becoming bigger, the U.S. must show that it was possible to work in a world of relatively greater power equality and deal with ever-larger problems springing from interdependence. The United States and China would have to work towards stabilizing the global economy, global ecosystem and global security (Lampton 2001).

It is worth mentioning the views of some of the neoliberal institutionalists such as Keohane, Doyle and Nye who have put forward views explaining that commercial and financial interdependence might work against major conflicts. However, due to lack of democracy on China's part and the American evangelical-style promotion of democracy, the tensions between the two countries might continue (Keohane 2005). Both the Americans and the Chinese are to be reminded about the complex nature of partnership between the two countries; and to look at the existing conflicts. Constructive measures are called for to manage this complicated process between the two countries and come up with outcomes that would positively affect future international relations in seminal ways (Lai 2011).

When it came to collaboration between the U.S. and its allies, the allies in the Asia-Pacific region explicitly supported the American stance whenever required. For instance, if Australia was asked to join one of the camps (US or China), it would choose and go for the American camp in a probable future bipolar world, as both the U.S. and Australia are rooted in an apparent kinship of history and culture. Australia still acts as the geopolitically vital cornerstone to the United States, as its leading ally in the Pacific (Kocsis and Nicholson 2012). The roles that the middle powers (such as ASEAN, Russia, South Korea and India) play are appreciated by China: their contributions to regional peace and stability are deemed inevitable. While these countries do pose impediments to the U.S. at times since the American government often times called for unconditional support. Countries of the Asia-Pacific region such as the Philippines, Australia and Japan have been allies of the United States and South Korea is another Asian state which relies on US military deterrence (Odgaard 2007).

On the diplomatic front, it is true that the Obama administration attempted to get back to the center of Asia-Pacific politics which was witnessed when it came to supporting and engaging with regional structures. However, the central idea was not about American disengagement or re-engagement but of priorities and emphasizing on the already existing complex groundwork of U.S.-Asia relations. Starting with the effort of signing the treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) with ASEAN in 2009; President Obama's presence in the East Asia Summit in November 2011 for the first time in the history of

American Presidents; Washington also tried to help fund ASEAN through Economic Support Fund (ESF); the U.S. also proposed areas of cooperation such as non-proliferation, trade facilitation initiatives through APEC and so forth, disaster preparedness, regional agreements, etc right after the announcement of the rebalance strategy (CRS 2012).

Protection of human rights issues and democracy were given enough importance in the broad strategic framework of the rebalance policy, to a degree as a result of which the then Secretary Clinton's visit to Burma came into being. This was followed by several Washington officials visiting the country (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 19 November, Issue: Vol. 161, No. 171).

As part of President Obama's manoeuvre to engage China, he visited China on a two-day state visit in November 2014 where he also attended the APEC Leaders Meeting. During this visit, Washington and Beijing agreed to sign a number of major agreements to improve cooperation in areas of military-to-military relationship; increase trade relations; encourage people-to-people ties and on issues relating to international and regional matters such as global economic governance, non-proliferation, climate change and pandemic diseases such as Ebola (The White House 2014).

While all this was a positive development, the year 2014 was also marred by China's aggressive behaviour towards its neighbouring American allies – Japan and the Philippines over the South China Sea which was perceived by Washington as posing challenge to the US. Furthermore, having, somewhat, learnt the American policies in the Asia-Pacific region, to downplay American role in the regional institutions in the region, China came up with a new Asian security concept. The concept was supported by China's idea that the Asians must run the affairs of Asia to solve the problems of the region and uphold the security of the region; the result of which was the launching of a \$50 billion Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank which was not an offshoot of the post-WWII US-led Bretton Woods economic system. During this trip, President Xi Jinping proclaimed the "Asia-Pacific Dream", which could be translated into the China Dream where China becomes stronger and even more confident both internally and externally. This idea presented China as the better option, World's No. 2 economy, for countries in

the region to tie themselves to for increased economic cooperation, stability and growth. An official explained President Obama's move to seek for cooperation as, "Disagreements, areas of competition, are normal and natural, but we want to build a relationship that is not defined by them." On the other hand, both the US and China showed cooperation was still possible, despite all the misunderstandings and competition, and went ahead and agreed on a landmark climate deal in which China approved to cap its emissions around 2030 (Lawrence, Leggett and Morrison 2014).

Jin Canrong, Professor and Associate Dean with School of International Studies at Renmin University of China, also pointed out:

“During Obama's term, however, Sino-US relations had a good start but with a bumpy ride before being stabilized... Looking back, the ‘rebalance to Asia-Pacific’ strategy cannot be called a success. It not only failed to contain the rise of China, but also deepened China's strategic mistrust of the US, which is against its interests... The exclusion of China from the TPP has also encouraged China to advance its Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RECP), Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP) as well as its ‘One Belt, One Road’ initiative, and prompted China to lead the creation of the BRICS Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank” (Canrong 2016).

One of the contentions in the Asia-Pacific region being maritime issues, China focuses a great deal on strengthening its maritime capabilities as it is a “manifestation of ‘prestige strategies’ pursued by governments seeking greater domestic legitimacy” (Ross 2009). And also, to be able to secure the important trade routes and crucial water bodies for which the powerful players are in conflict in the Asia-Pacific waters. According to the Chinese, the U.S. being one of these powerful players has become more assertive and practical in moulding the security structure in the region to fulfil American interests by using rebalance policy to Asia with the sole objective of containing China (Xinbo 2012).

Nonetheless, Obama went on to refute the claims saying, "Our goal is not to counter China. Our goal is not to contain China. Our goal is to make sure those international rules and norms are respected and that includes in the area of maritime dispute” (Obama and Aquino III 2014).

The trend during the last months of the Obama administration seemed to hint toward want for cooperation and stability with China. In the South China Sea, the other disputes include Philippines and Malaysia being trapped in maritime disputes which has to do with boundary conflicts with China. However, in all these issues, Washington repeatedly shown restraint to stay away from getting tangled in any direct confrontation with China or any other Asian country but for them to resolve territorial or water disputes through multilateral arrangements and cooperation, even through the adoption of a 'code of conduct' (Thuy 2011).

Manifestation of such limitations has been supported by instances such as, American's demonstration of apparent unwillingness, in 2012, to lend military or any other form of strong and visible support to the Philippines when Beijing captured the Scarborough Shoal, despite of the fact that there was already a bilateral defense agreement between both the countries. Another incident would be the one which took place in November 2013 in which China went ahead unilaterally to declare the imposition of an Air Defense Identification Zone in the East China Sea across the contentious Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, which are under Japan's administrative control but China has claims on them. China's breach over this area also happened to overlap with Taiwanese and South Korean air space. Obviously, Taiwan, Japan and South Korea were fuming over this issue and the U.S. was expected to do something. However, the responsive-maneuver Washington took was quite limited and unimposing as it sent just two unescorted and unarmed B-52 bombers over the ADIZ, without any further pressure to push Beijing back from its disputable position. Beijing also went on to support Hainan province's declaration of new regulations regarding fishing within the South China Sea, which came into effect from January 2014 (Banyan 2014).

The other incident which testified US' restraint was USS Cowpens (CG-63) incident of December 2013, which also revealed possibilities of potential mishaps occurring engaging naval vessels and military aircraft. Following the incident the U.S. Pacific Fleet stated, "This incident underscores the need to ensure the highest standards of professional seamanship, including communications between vessels, to mitigate the risk of an unintended incident or mishap" (Thayer 2013).

New developments such as Obama's eight-day visit to Asia in April 2014, was a strong diplomatic gesture forward to renovate reliability, cooperation and promises underpinning the rebalance strategy towards the countries of the region including China. Also, in order to foster deeper and stronger ties with the allies in the region, President Obama continued to visit Washington's main allies such as Japan, Malaysia, Philippines and South Korea, and partners such as India (Price 2015). Washington wanted its allies such as South Korea to co-operate and work with the U.S. against increasing nuclear and missile threats from North Korea. With all these diplomatic gestures, the Obama administration actively pursued to ensure US reliability through bilateral and multilateral efforts (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 15 July, Serial No. 114–73).

It was apparent that the United States did not want to wage a full-fledged war in the Asia-Pacific region but it also attempted to make its stand clear on important strategic and security issues. However, the U.S. and China relations got strained over the South China Sea issue starting mid-2015 and their relationship did not ease until after July 2016. Washington's reaction to the award of the Hague-based tribunal on the South China Sea dispute wherein the court's verdict greatly supported the Philippines is important to be noted (Gady 2016). The court ruled that China's nine-dash line and claim to historical rights were invalid. And Washington supported the verdict right away stating:

“The decision today by the Tribunal in the Philippines-China arbitration is an important contribution to the shared goal of a peaceful resolution to disputes in the South China Sea... We are still studying the decision and have no comment on the merits of the case, but some important principles have been clear from the beginning of this case and are worth restating” (Gady 2016).

And in the month of September 2016, President Obama visited China for the third time, on his last trip to Asia before leaving office, to attend the G-20 summit. It was described as “cementing their partnership on climate change and offering a rare display of harmony in a relationship that has become increasingly discordant” between the U.S. and China, where both the leaders – President Obama and President Xi Jinping – made a commitment to the Paris climate agreement. “Despite our differences on other issues, we hope our willingness to work together on this issue will inspire further ambition and

further action around the world,” President Obama declared. President Xi praised the Paris agreement as a milestone, adding, “It was under Chinese leadership that much of this progress was made” (*The New York Times* 2016, 3 September). China had become so much more assertive by the time Obama administration ended as compared to when the administration came into power in the White House.

North Korea

In the rebalancing policy, North Korea was perceived as a security threat to the US. The North Korean government continued to criticize the Obama administration’s policies towards the country by claiming that they were hostile at the United Nations, and also went on to threaten that if Washington continued to pursue the hostile attitude towards North Korea, it would not stop its nuclear weapons generation activities and even attack the U.S. To substantiate the above statement, take an instance such as the United Nations 67th General Assembly’s First Committee (on nuclear disarmament) which was held on October 15, 2012, there the North Korean delegate reaffirmed that Pyongyang’s nuclear deterrent was the United States. North Korea made it clear that this was due to US nuclear threat and the nuclear deterrent that followed; and that all of these efforts were aimed towards strengthening economic growth accompanied by improving the living standards of the people. The North Korean officials went on to claim that the world looked at the country’s efforts towards building its economy as driven by some military purpose by adding such accusations such as long-range missile tests as well as enriching uranium processes. The officials representing North Korea sternly put it on the table that the country would go on with the nuclear projects unless the United States backed down on its current harsh policy toward North Korea. If not, the DPRK was determined to go on to accomplish its destiny as a nuclear weapons state (Haggard 2012).

North Korea was carrying out its outrageous political as well as strategic actions affecting the mindset, stability and peace of the region and the world. After the demise of Kim Jong Il, the young leader Kim Jong Un who succeeded his father had the desire to carry on the course laid down by the deceased leader. The young leader’s aspiration to do so was a noteworthy feature in the new government’s regime since its commencement. The new leadership wanted and aimed towards turning the country into an economic giant

while pursuing its path to become a ‘nuclear weapons state’. The North Korean state seemingly assumed that both of these factors were important in confirming the status of the country, a status that would make the country recognize globally. It was noteworthy that the Kim Jong-un government did not simply show satisfaction to take over the nuclear power status from the previous administration but aimed at carrying on and strengthening the earlier achievements. It was a negatively attention-grabbing fact that the amended North Korean constitution exposed and exalted the achievements of Kim Jong il in building up the North Korean state to become an unshakable political ideological state strengthened by acquiring nuclear fissile materials and by forming a strong and undefeatable military state. The achievements were celebrated showing and explaining that those efforts enabled and paved the way to the formation of a magnificently strong, influential and prosperous state (*The Independent* 2017).

Ironically, the North Korean state is recognized as a nuclear power by its own constitution. At various occasions, the new government asserted that the country could not be threatened or bullied by the big world powers (*CNN* 2012).

Thus, since the time Kim Jong un took over the President’s office, Pyongyang accelerated its diplomatic actions towards Southeast Asian states. An interesting development was Pyongyang’s attempt to get closer to Myanmar by enhancing diplomatic overtures. This crossed paths with the United States which was increasingly improving relationship with Myanmar in recent times, through recent events such as witnessing and applauding the release of Aung San Suu Kyi (leader of the democratic reform movement) by the Myanmar government and exchange of high level official visits. It was important to note that Myanmar and its democratic reforms could be an example to North Korea to reform its system and open up the state for positive impact (Work 2017).

It is clearly evident that behind North Korea’s nuclear threats, there is a bargaining strategy. It wanted the United States and others to take it seriously. And at the same time, food assistance was another bargaining chip between North Korea and the US for reduction in nuclear material and weapons production and proliferation by Pyongyang. The attitude of Pyongyang evidently confirmed this fact (Nuclear Threat Initiative 2011).

Another development took place in July 2016 where North Korean government declared that the Obama administration had crossed “the red line” and in effect declared “war” by identifying their leader Kim Jong Un as a sanctioned individual. Pyongyang also warned that if the US and South Korea continued to hold joint military exercises south of the Demilitarized Zone, a brutal confrontation could explode (Talmadge 2016).

The discussion on the political and diplomatic aspects of Obama’s rebalancing strategy, thus, revealed several interesting nuances. Further, it disclosed the determination of the President to focus fiercely on Asia-Pacific and relegate the Middle East (the other traditional focus of the US foreign policy) to the background. Further, the policy was detailed to include the military and economic aspects that will be addressed in the continuing chapters. Clearly, the Asia-Pacific policy was intended to be the signature foreign policy of the administration.

Chapter 4

Military-Security Dimension

Introduction

The course of action of the United States to enhance focus towards the Asia-Pacific region as compared to other theatres of the world, whether be it the trans-Atlantic or West Asia (Iraq and Afghanistan), in order to acquire a fundamental geographical shift in foreign policy direction went fine with Washington's view of the 21st century as America's Pacific Century (Clinton 2011, 10 November). This chapter will look into the US national security interests and challenges it faced in the region, elaboration of the Asia-Pacific strategy by government officials, Congressional and expert analysis on the strategy and assess America's security-military cooperation with allies and partners.

However, the U.S. was a Pacific power for over one and a half centuries and therefore, Washington's power projection in the Asia-Pacific region under the Obama administration could not be viewed as a new phenomenon. There were four striking military-strategic features of Obama's rebalance strategy, such as – firstly, realizing the importance and need to boost the U.S. military superiority and presence in the Asia-Pacific region; secondly, the process of relocating American military posture in the region; thirdly, prioritizing the region and escalating military engagement as compared to other regions of the world during a time when the American government had to cut down defense budget allocation and spending; and fourthly, the rebalance strategic policy benefited from a bipartisan support, even if the resource allocations were not adequate or proportionate to the needs in implementing the rebalance policy. In addition, the rebalance policy included a significant military element since its inception. The Obama administration had promised to move 60 percent of its navy to operate in the Asia-Pacific region by 2020 under the strategic policy (Department of Defense 2014).

American engagement in the region has always been one of change and continuity. To explain the need for forward posture of the American military towards the Asia-Pacific theatre, Obama stated:

“As we consider the future of our armed forces, we've begun a review that will identify our most important strategic interests and guide our defense priorities and spending over the coming decade...our presence and mission in the Asia Pacific a top priority. As a result, reductions in U.S. defense spending will not -- I repeat, will not -- come at the expense of the Asia Pacific” (Obama 2011, 17 November).

Starting from 2010, several experts and policy makers tried to explain the term pivot/rebalance of the US security and military strategy in their own terms. Around the beginning of 2008 election, then Presidential candidate Barack Obama declared that the United States' alliances with Asia showed the kind of friendships that had endured the test of time, these alliances stayed on as vital constituents of Asian security and assurance (Occasional Analysis: Candidate Views 2008).

The above argument was crucial, more so, in the light of growing Chinese military ambitions and forward-leaning posture in utilizing its domestic growth for external expansion – politically, economically and militarily. As President Obama entered office, one of his sweeping agendas was to reinstate America's position globally and move toward the reconstruction and revitalisation of American alliance system in order to face the common threats of the 21st century. These common challenges comprised of economic stability, climate change, nuclear proliferation and terrorism among others. Obama even declared in his 2009 Prague speech pledging to push for a nuclear weapons-free world, however, he was not able to fulfill his statement and goals regarding that (Obama 2009, 5 April).

It is important to assess President Obama's performance during the two terms in the office. Obama administration's foreign policy in the second term was essentially driven by America's 'rebalancing' policy toward the Asia-Pacific realm which seemed to appear as top priority in Washington's strategic thinking. Concerning problems of the 21st century, countries as well as regional organisations in the Asia-Pacific have big roles to play in devising and providing solutions (U.S. Congressional Hearing, A Majority Staff Report 2014).

The Security Challenges the U.S. Faced in the Asia-Pacific Region

The U.S. rebalancing strategy clearly made sure that the military part of the policy was evident and well-built. The approach was defined by redeployment of America's military hardware, which became the focal point of international and regional attention. Nevertheless, Washington made the move through rebalance policy and brought about a change in the Asia-Pacific security structure which was not just military in character but more significantly strategic in nature. The Obama administration was observed to have given thrust to bilateral ties, with particular emphasis on military commitment in the region, with China's increasing aggressive behavior in the background. The rising bilateral military engagements were manifested through ties with Australia, Japan, India, Singapore and other nations of the region (Muni and Chadha 2014).

Washington shifted its foreign policy by pivoting from the middle east theatre by prioritizing Asia-Pacific region – despite the cut down in defense spending, the decision to maintain widespread military arrangements and deployments in the region; the Obama administration giving equal importance stretching from the Indian Ocean throughout South Asia, Southeast Asia, Pacific, Northeast Asia till the farthest tip of East Asia; growing development of strategic initiatives like Air-Sea Battle concept in order to counter increasing 'Anti-Access/Area Denial' efforts in the region especially by China in the disputed waters in Taiwan area and down the Chinese maritime rim (Sutter et al. 2013). The afore mentioned features defined the military aspect of the rebalance policy.

China's rapid enhancement in military capabilities over the last few years posed an increasing threat to the U.S. presence in the region and other countries of the region. This increasingly became a serious reason for concern for the US. In its assessment, the US Department of Defense (DoD) China Report for 2012, said:

“China's approach to dealing with this challenge is manifested in a sustained effort to develop the capability to attack, at long ranges, military forces that might deploy and or operate within the western Pacific, which the DoD characterizes [sic] as 'anti-access' and 'area denial' (A2/AD) capabilities” (Muni and Vivek 2014).

Experts pointed out China's rapid development in military technology which made it possible for Beijing to close the gap faster than Washington had anticipated. It was argued that this Chinese military progress would be able to even bring both the US and China at a par in military capability in the region and China's immediate neighbourhood. China's rapidly emerging display of anti-access and area-denial (A2AD) technology and capabilities was posing a stronger challenge to the US forces in accessing the region (Kelly et al. 2014).

The Air-Sea Battle concept of the US was challenged by China too when reports came out of China having acquired and deployed "fixed ocean-floor acoustic arrays off its coast, presumably with the intent to monitor foreign submarine activities in the near seas". This technology reversed the idea that China lacked investment and know-how in the realm of anti-submarine warfare and that this new technology could protect China's growing efforts to deploy SSBNs (Kazianis 2014).

China had reportedly been working on command, control, intelligence, computers, communications, reconnaissance (C4ISR), surveillance and space-based architecture (Easton and Stokes 2011). Many a times, cyber attacks in the US pointed towards China (Lewis and Saporito 2015).

Also with the number of medium-range ballistic missiles, land-attack cruise missiles, air-launched standoff attack weapons and other weapons which could attack US carriers, the risks and challenges for the US to defend, for instance, South China Sea or its allies like Taiwan, in the region had tremendously increased. "China's Military Strategy", China's defense white paper issued in 2015 articulated PLA's obligations to safeguard China's external security interests (*Xinhua* 2015) China was also restructuring its military to meet the new challenges, to expand from the First Island Chain into the Indian Ocean.

In light of the challenges posed by China in the Asia-Pacific region, synchronized in such a streamlined manner with the American values and interests, Leon Panetta commented that America's military presence in the Pacific would be present for a long time while strengthening its presence. And, this was amidst "troubling lack of transparency, coupled with increasingly assertive activity in the East and South China Seas". American Defense

officials weren't in favor of cuts in defense expenditure saying that it would be disastrous, leading to unwanted troop reductions in the Pacific (Bumiller 2011). The defense officials argued:

“Even a small drawdown of, say, 5,000 troops would be seen in the region as a symbolic retreat even as China rapidly expands its military capabilities. In China, analysts say a military modernization program for the People's Liberation Army is a delayed and essential upgrading after decades when the Communist Party subordinated military needs to civilian ones. In the Chinese military's view, the buildup is needed to defend against what it sees as a growing and potentially unfriendly American presence in the Pacific” (Bumiller 2011).

China definitely held the view that the U.S.' rebalance strategy in Asia was driven by “cold War mentality”, which could backfire Washington's rebalance strategy in Asia. It was understood by China that the U.S. rebalancing of foreign policy was portrayed by a more antagonistic attitude towards it. Chinese experts felt that even if the U.S. denied openly that it was not trying to contain China, there were prevalent suspicion that the U.S. had a hidden agenda to counterbalance China's increasing power in the Asia-Pacific region through the strategic rebalancing policy. They also believed that the United States had been using protection of freedom of navigation in the international waters as an excuse to intensify its involvement and engagement in the territorial clashes over the South China Sea between China and various South-eastern Asian countries (Linfei and Ran 2011).

Over the last few years, tensions escalated in the region, over regional flashpoints such as North Korean nuclear issue and the territorial disputes in South and East China Seas. The fear was that the present strain over these issues could lead to acute destabilization of security and stability in the region (Li 2014). Interestingly, amidst all the commotions, the Obama administration still declared to set out advanced coastal combat ships into the Asia-Pacific region through its allies such as the Philippines and Singapore in order to expand America's presence in the region.

The next imminent threat that challenged the regional and international stability was North Korea – its internal stability, development of ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons, openly terming US as its enemy state, aggressive patrolling, stationing of artilleries along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), etc. And North Korea's other issues such as human rights abuse, drug and human trafficking, counterfeiting undermined security and stability in the

Korean peninsula and the region. While it was evident that North Korea followed the pattern of hard bargaining to get what it wanted immediately when it came to dealing with the United States (Cha and Kang 2004).

Any constructive dialogue with North Korea was not really possible from both the American and the South Korean sides during the Obama administration. North Korea put its military first to develop asymmetry artillery capability. In 2015, Pyongyang boasted of possessing a miniaturized nuclear warhead on a long-range ballistic missile to target the US. It had acquired capability to destroy American bases in Japan such as in Kanagawa Prefecture, Okinawa among others, and in South Korea such as Camp Humphreys in Pyeongtaek, Camp Stanley Army Base in Uijeongbu among others, along with big stockpiles of chemical weapons (Cha 2002). The US, South Korea, China and Russia have stakes in managing North Korea and stability of the region.

US-Russia relationship, on the other hand, went coarse after Russia's Ukraine crisis in February 2014. Russia was also seen to be getting closer to China and the Asian region for economic and military trade. The fact that Russia had been diverting increasingly its military resources toward the Far East was a cause for concern for the US and its allies. For instance, the deployment of Russian naval surface action group to the Coral Sea during the 2014 Brisbane G-20 Summit created tensions with the Australian government. In 2014, another conflicting instance took place when Russian bombers were found patrolling near Guam and Russian fighters refueling in Cam Ranh Bay. This reflected Vietnam's complex position in a region where constant geo-political struggle existed between Russia and China on one side and US, Japan and several Southeast Asian US allies on the other side (Brunnstorm 2015).

Deployment of Troops

The most visible characteristic of the rebalance strategy was the movement of the American force posture both towards and within the Asia and the Pacific region. The military and the security scenario in the region would continue to change as the regional powers build up their A2/AD capabilities and Washington strategized in response to the security developments of the region. The US capabilities deployed in the Asia-Pacific

region under the rebalance policy included strategic bombers, guided-missile submarines, power projection from carrier strike groups; anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capability resident in ships, submarines, and patrol aircraft operation throughout the region; ballistic missile defense from a system of platforms and installations in Guam, Japan, Korea, and forward-operating and forward-deployed Aegis-equipped Navy frigates; air superiority from fourth as well as fifth generation jets deployed to Korea and Japan; finally, ISR capabilities from space-based to tactical systems providing early warning and support to war fighters (CSIS 2016).

The US needed to spend, commit and strengthen its position in the region, even for the years to come. The US military presence in peacetime in the region was to ensure and deter aerial reconnaissance, freedom of navigation (FON) operations, exercise and interact with other vessels on the waters, training to advance US and collective capabilities, calls on foreign ports, patrol in international airspace and ready for a well-timed response to various possible disaster, threats and conflict in the Asia-Pacific region or any part of the world (CSIS 2016).

The United States has had its military bases in the Northeast of the region since the cold war times. With rebalance policy, Washington reorganized and moved the bulk of its naval deployments towards the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean largely focusing on the Second Island Chain with Guam as an important base. This deployment of the US military resources and signing of defense agreements were beneficial to both US interests and security of its allies, partner countries and the security of the region. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta stated that future defense cuts were not going to be felt in Asia-pacific or West Asia, which was clearly stated in the Department of Defense's (DoD's) January 2012 "Strategic Guidance". It confirmed that even if resources get reduced such as cuts in the size of the navy and minimization in Army and Marine ground forces, the US would continue to maintain a "sustainable pace of presence operations abroad" through deployments and exercises. The document also said that "reduced resources" would require "thoughtful choices" when it comes to decision making with regards to "location and frequency" of the operations. The US took various measures to enhance air, land and sea capabilities to rise to any challenge from the enemy state(s). For instance, with the

deployment of THAAD battery and rotational air forces in Guam, America's capability to defend its territories and allies was anticipated to be much more enhanced during times of conflict (Department of Defense 2012).

The Obama administration also announced November 2011 that it was sending 2,500 Marines to a new base in Australia. The United States quickly established the former British prison colony, Australia, as its foreign policy anchor for potentially tumultuous times ahead. These troops were expected to rotate through Darwin and Northern Territory. Australia's place in Obama administration's Asia-Pacific strategy showed that the trans-Pacific alliance was strong and not a redundant treaty, such changes developed despite suggestions by several scholars who viewed treaties such as ANZUS as outdated (Obama 2011).

The premeditated deployments of troops and equipments to Australia and Singapore symbolized an enlargement of U.S. presence in the Asia-Pacific region; even the U.S. and the Philippines talked about new military options. Furthermore, the Obama administration and the DoD laid emphasis on the importance of increased training and joint exercises with allied countries as well as with the new military partners, to "ensure collective capability and capacity for security common interests" (Department of Defense 2012). Also America believed that China's rise, in this 21st Century, was expected to be one of the defining factors in international strategic realm and that China's military was entering the international maritime domain, which had been for long dominated by the U.S. Navy. Also, keeping Asia-Pacific in mind, the DoD was working on the Air-Sea Battle (ASB) concept to improve the efficiency of the U.S. Air Force and Naval units (CRS 2012).

Right after the U.S. Defense Strategy Review Report came out in January 2012, China's response was that they paid:

"...attention to' the strategic defense guidelines and will 'closely watch out for' the influence of the new U.S. policy shift on the security situation of the Asia-Pacific region and the world at large... In contrast, remarks by PLA analysts in PLA media have been much more critical, suggesting that the U.S. pivot represents a return to Cold War-style thinking. According to these remarks, the United States regards China as a threat, and will formulate its national security plans on the premise of this threat assessment" (Cheng 2013).

An astounding amount of \$438 billion was recorded as deficit, an all-time high, by the U.S. government in the FY08. In an astonishing revelation, this number turned out to be just a part of high total national debt which surpassed more than \$10 trillion in the previous year. During such financial crises, the United States declared and planned to extend its military presence which would turn out to be more expensive. Nonetheless, the already stationed troops had the ability to sustain and maintain security; situation in these places didn't necessarily depend on the new procurement. But, it seemed impossible to refute the fact that the already difficult scenario brought about by the readjustment of policies was made trickier by the global recession. Thus, with the recent global recession having crippled many economies including the United States economy there was no doubt in stating that the military budget would go through a severe scrutiny. As declared by Washington, however, the new deployment or military posture of the United States in the region was expected not to be affected much by the above mentioned scrutiny or cuts in Washington's spending (Department of Defense 2014).

It is a well known fact that the United States had always hung on to both the ability and craving to remain as a spring for stability as well as prosperity. Security, stability and growth in the Asia and Pacific seemed to be in sync with America's national interest and also judging by Washington's commitment to be engaged in the region, it showed that the whole rebalance strategy was fully in the interest of America's national security (Department of Defense 2014). Even then, the budget for the new deployment (hard power) did not cover aspects that come under soft power such as cultural activities, aid and diplomats. Therefore, the credit crunch did not allow the Obama administration to invest resources in a wide range manner in the region, as it should have done.

The US and Japan agreed on a new plan in 2012 to delink the construction of the FRF from the matter of relocating of Marines to Guam. Of the 18,000 US marines in Okinawa, both the countries also agreed to relocate 4,800 to Guam, where the remaining would go to Hawaii or the West Coast of the United States or rotate throughout Asia and the Pacific region which included Australia. As allies of the United States shared the responsibility of spending finance on deployment of forces, Japan also shared the burden for the above mentioned Marine Crops. In addition to this, the signing of the Enhanced Defence

Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) in April 2014 between the US and the Philippines was a significant move to improve its deployment posture in the region for both the countries. The US also had LCSs rotational force operating out of Singapore. To Japan, the US had deployed additional ballistic missile defense destroyers like USS Benfold (deployed), USS Milius (2017) and USS Barry (2016) (CSIS 2016).

The EDCA (Enhanced Defense Co-operation Agreement), a divisive 10-year defense agreement, was signed, which would permit increased joint military training exercises, frequent rotation of U.S. troops, warplanes, ships all the way through the islands. The Philippines Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario described by stating "The EDCA elevates to a higher plane of engagement our already robust defense alliance." President Obama, however, went on to confirm that the defense pact was not to contain China, with whom Manila was stuck in a serious territorial dispute (BBC 2014, 28 April). Nevertheless, this defense pact was negatively perceived by Beijing (BBC 2014, 29 April). According to a report by the CNN:

“U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter suggested that EDCA could support freedom of navigation and freedom of the commons in regional waters, in light of his country's ‘rebalance to the Asia Pacific region’ that entails repositioning men and materiel in friendly countries. The conditions governing the presence of U.S. forces in the Philippines will be different from those in Japan and South Korea, which host U.S. military bases. EDCA explicitly prohibits the U.S. from establishing a permanent military presence or bases in the Philippines” (CNN 2016).

Right before President Obama left office, the Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte created upheavals with regards to the future of U.S.-Philippine relations. The Filipino President went on to threaten the U.S. to review and discontinue the implementation of the major defense agreement with Washington. This was also during a time when he started turning to China for closer ties. However, the agreement survived (Stratfor 2016).

In South Korea, the deployment was being restructured under two categories: the Land Partnership Plan (LPP) which was funded by the United States, consolidating the troops which were north of Seoul under USAG Humphreys. While the other being the Yongsan Relocation Plan (YRP) which consolidated the US Forces Korea (USFK) into two existing

centres near Pyongtaek and Daegu which are in South of Seoul. This second one was funded by the South Korean government (US Forces Korea J5 Strategic Communication Division 2015).

In another crucial strategic development, the thirtieth Australia-United States Ministerial (AUSMIN) meeting was held on 13 October 2015 in Boston. During the consultations, both the countries “reaffirmed the Alliance, reiterated a commitment to implement fully the U.S. Force Posture Initiatives in Australia”. The meeting was also significant as the US and Australia agreed and signed a Joint Statement on Defense Cooperation. The agreement expressed “the principles underpinning defense cooperation”. It highlighted both the countries “shared commitment to further enhance military interoperability and intelligence cooperation, as well as build cooperation with regional partners”. Furthermore, US-Australia’s biennial joint military exercise “Talisman Saber 2015” also confirmed both the countries’ commitments and endurance of the Alliance system (The White House 2016).

Traditional and Non-traditional Challenges

These problems are the ones which do not have a visible face but are becoming huge problems in this globalised era. They are challenges such as territorial disputes, proliferation of nuclear and chemical weapons, natural disasters, humanitarian crisis, piracy, climate change and terrorism.

South China Sea

Some of the American policy makers are fascinated by the English geographer Halford Mackinders’s “Heartland” theory. Mackinder once said, “Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland commands the World Island (Eurasia).” Tian Yuan and Zhang Xin, Chinese scholars, were of the view that some groups of strategic decision makers in Washington were inspired by Mackinder’s theory and planned to apply the same theory in the Asian context. They believed that having power over the South China Sea would enable the U.S. navy and air force command East Asia and subsequently command the ‘World Island’ (Yuan and Xin 2011).



History reveals that when great powers faltered, China never hesitated to seize the opportunity to advance its interests, especially in the South China Sea. As American forces withdrew from Vietnam in the mid-1970s, China grabbed the Paracel Islands from Saigon (present Ho Chi Minh City). Similarly, when the Soviet Union withdrew from Vietnam's Cam Ranh Bay and the United States terminated its base agreement with the Philippines, China quietly occupied Mischief Reef to the dismay of Manila. Slowly, China by hook or crook had been grabbing parts of the South China Sea which is a marginal sea including areas from the Singapore and Malacca Straits to the Strait of Taiwan in the Pacific Ocean. China had gone ahead to establish and secure an extensive presence in the East and South China Seas. The Asian power carried out a "rapid-fire, systematic island-building campaign in the South China Sea, transforming reefs and rocks into small but bristling island bases equipped with military runways, port facilities, and major weapons platforms" (Rapp-Hooper and Krejsa 2017)

In this process of clutching territories, disputes had been created between China and countries including Malaysia, Brunei, the Philippines, Vietnam and Taiwan. The small Islands in this area are subjected to an array of challenging territorial claims. One-third of world trade flows over these disputed waters which makes interests converge. Also in these waters, an overabundance of natural resources could be found such as natural gas, oil, fishes, etc. Given all the reasons behind such attention and focus conferred upon by the countries, the U.S. declared to have much at stake like the other countries which are parties to the dispute. During the ASEAN meeting in July 2010, the then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton expressed Obama administration's desire for freedom of navigation, open access to Asia's maritime commons, and respect for international law in the South China Sea. In another meeting, Clinton warned that the U.S. was keeping a watch and was aware of the confrontations. And in any eventuality, Washington would not stay quiet (Kania 2013).

However, Washington felt that the American interests in these waters were increasingly at risk due to the rapidly booming economic and military influence of China. Washington's interests remained to uphold the freedom in sea lines communication both for peaceful military exercises including humanitarian activities and coastal defense as well as commercial purposes to all the countries. However, China had been consistently blocking

such notions of freedom in these waters (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 17 September, S. HRG. 114-214).

It will not be an exaggeration to add up the significance of the South China Sea to American interests. The sea connects the Western Pacific and the Indian Oceans, the sea routes passing through these waters account for about \$1.2 trillion in U.S. trade annually. It could be explained here why the United States selected India as a close partner in its Asia-Pacific policy; one of the main issues being maritime security and access to maritime resources. Although India had always shown seriousness about the Indian Ocean, it hardly demonstrated any interest in the South China Sea until recently. India's rise had been supported by the United States and other smaller Southeast Asian countries to balance off China rising power. And its recent interest and endeavour into exploring oil and energy in the South China Sea was viewed and welcomed optimistically by the United States as well as the other Southeast Asian countries. As natural partners, India and the U.S. didn't fail to show common views on both the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean (Panda 2012).

In all of this, the general idea was that both the United States and China should work together towards benefitting both and others too and not create a conflicting situation. Nevertheless, this turned out to be a painstaking experience for the Obama administration and this entailed the need for pursuing a larger regional cooperation by the US in the region. By the second term in office, it became clear to the Obama administration and American law makers that China had increasingly become hard to deal with. On Washington's part, its aim was preserving U.S. and allied interests in these waters as well as upholding legal norms. From the US-led global system, China was benefitting the most; keeping this in mind, it was expected of China to play by the rules of the system. Engaging China in a constructive manner was one of the most pivotal objectives of the Obama administration. At any cost, diplomatic confrontation or military conflict was attempted to be avoided (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 17 September, S. HRG. 114-214).

Nevertheless, like any other country in the Asia and Pacific region, Russia had misgivings concerning Chinese military objective. In light of this distrust, Russia hadn't been able to entirely trust China even though both the countries had engaged in military partnerships

like Maritime Cooperation 2012 which included joint naval exercises (*The People's Daily* 2012). On the contrary, Russia has been working hard towards reinforcing its naval strength in the Far Eastern region (*Reuters* 2011).

It was quite visible that the Obama administration never sent such stern warning to China on the issue of South China Sea. China, time and again, got away with its antagonistic activities in the contested waters. This was evident, for instance, when Beijing sent out deployment of more than 80 naval vessels in the South China Sea to protect an oil rig, which was an open move by China claiming territories on its periphery through “paramilitary operations short of war” (POSOW). The use of coercion, threat of force and intimidation by Beijing was evident in its actions. This happened just four days after the trip President Obama made to American allies in the East Asian countries in 2014 where the President reassured the allies to America’s support and commitment. The move that the U.S. made was seen by China as premeditated and calculated provocation. Through such actions, China sent a clear signal to countries including the U.S., Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia and India, that it had the “resolve and capability to control and exploit the South China Sea and deny it to others” (Moens and Smith-Windsor 2016).

The move to explore oil by China in the South China Sea was a blow to the Obama administration’s “rebalance policy” as it showed how China could challenge America’s “credibility as a regional security anchor or security guarantor”. China saw that neither the U.S. nor the surrounding neighbouring countries would be able to take action with force to counter Beijing’s increasing hostile efforts in the disputed waters (Moens and Smith-Windsor 2016).

In an interesting turn of events, the Hague-tribunal heavily favoured the Philippines by rejecting China’s historic rights and claims over a majority part of the South China Sea in July 2016. The International tribunal also reprimanded China for constructing artificial islands in the South China Sea saying that the country had no legal rights to do so in the disputed waters. This was welcome by the United States and many other countries too, however, China rejected it. This was expected to be a blow to China’s claims but China didn’t show much respect, deterrence or even restraint after the ruling; while it gave at least

some hope to the other countries like Brunei, Indonesia, Taiwan, Malaysia and Vietnam (*The New York Times* 2016).

As explained before, even as China's aggressive behavior became more pronounced, South China Sea issue garnered much attention at home. It is one of the few issues in the Asia-Pacific region that had enjoyed a bipartisan support. As mentioned before in the role of the Congress, Congressional hearings were conducted that targeted this particular issue – the South China Sea. Bill such as S.2865 – Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Initiative Act of 2016 – was introduced by Sen. Benjamin L. Cardin (Dem. from Maryland) in Senate on 27 April 2016 and the bill was read two times after which it was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations. The bill authorized “the Department of Defense (DOD) to establish the Maritime Security Initiative to provide assistance and training through September 30, 2022, for maritime security and domain awareness for countries in the Asia-Pacific region” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2016, 27 April, S.2865).

In light of the contentions in the South China Sea, the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations had a business meeting on 20 May 2014 which was presided by Senator Robert Menendez. As mentioned before, in this legislation, Senate Resolution 412 of the 113th Congress (2013-2014) reaffirmed,

“the strong support of the United States Government for freedom of navigation and other internationally lawful uses of sea and airspace in the Asia-Pacific region, and for the peaceful diplomatic resolution of outstanding territorial and maritime claims and disputes” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2014, 20 May, S. Res. 412).

Proliferation, Nuclear and Security Issues

When it comes to proliferation issue, North Korean proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and nuclear technologies to Syria and Iraq has been a dangerous threat to human security (Albright and Walrond 2012). Since North Korean policies are unpredictable, if push and shove comes to meet economic needs, fissile materials might even fall into wrong hands (terrorist groups) (Blair 2009).

Mechanisms such as Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) are in place for fighting the problems posed by proliferation activities; however, increased coordination is required for effective use of the PSI mechanism by the partner countries. Even with limited jurisdiction, the US Pacific Command, in 2014, carried out a number of exercises along with 31 countries to combat proliferation threats (Garamone 2014).

In this region, security and power relations revolved around two types of relationships. They are as follows: one relationship rotated around the United States, Russia and China while the other one spun around China, India and Pakistan. In the first group, the countries are capable of deterring each other. However, there also exists the fear that reductions by the United States and Russia could create the environment for Beijing to gallop to equivalence. Minimal deterrence on China's part is called for to offer strategic stability in the region. Competition with the United States and also Russia being an ongoing phenomenon, China's worries about India and Pakistan's nuclear arsenal are not less. That is, if the nuclear competition and rivalry between China and India get worse, and creates an environment of nuclear arms race in South Asia, China will not be able to sit back but respond, which might attract the United States and Russia into the matter (Cossa and Santoro 2012).

Thus, China seemed to have a superior power and influence in shaping key security and power agenda in the region. China's progressive modernization of weapons and North Korea's nuclear weapons development were altering Asia's security milieu. And thus, the question on the minds of the US allies was how Washington would provide security for its allies in the Asia-Pacific region, in the light of the declaration to reduce its nuclear capability, with China's growing nuclear capability, and North Korea's constant threats. However, South Korea and Japan showed and declared confidence in Obama administration's capability to provide security for them, against some negative opinions within each countries. And amidst all this, Australia being one of the foremost allies of the United States went ahead to accept the additional American troops on a rotational basis. However, there was much debate even in Australia on the impact and requirement of American troops and nuclear aspect of the military presence in the country (Department of Defense 2014).

Several American allies in Asia and Pacific were of the view that whatever length the United States had gone in pressing forward the issue of nuclear disarmament was so less as compared to what was expected of the United States. And that the New START between the United States (against much domestic opposition) and Russia (with a good deal of lack of enthusiasm) was in slow progress without a definite direction. They didn't even reflect any real attempt toward non-proliferation, fighting nuclear terrorism or achieving nuclear security (Cossa and David 2012).

Nonetheless, the United States would not be able to compel the countries in the region in many ways to adopt policies, in case if the P-5 initiative which had to do with reduction of nuclear weapons ever enlarges to incorporate the countries with nuclear arsenals in Asia, it would open up another dimension in the drive for non-proliferation by stabilizing any scenario of arms race. For instance, when Obama visited Myanmar in 2012, Thein Sein's government agreed to sign an Additional Protocol with the International Atomic Energy Agency, which would be followed up by nuclear inspectors inspecting in its territory. It may be recalled that Myanmar had disposed earlier all nuclear activity and stopped collaborating with North Korea on nuclear matters. Also, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) needed to see the light of day (Cossa and David 2012). All in all, meaningful and effective dialogues were called for in the region between states on matters of nuclear non-proliferation as well as elimination and reduction of the weapons of mass destruction, with the United States as the forefront leader by the Obama administration.

At present, North Korea's nuclear menace gave the impression of being a big threat looming over the region as well as affecting international security realm. With no picture of peace in the immediate future between the North and the South (the two Koreas), the dilemma caused by North Korea's missile and nuclear threat appeared to grow more serious. Consequently, the whole scenario in the region made the security situation as challenging as ever. The United States being the Pacific power had the responsibility to contribute any necessary diplomatic assistance towards the security and stability of the region. One of such initiatives was the Six-Party Talks which were a sequence of multilateral dialogues held sporadically ever since 2003. The states present at the meetings included China, Japan, North Korea, Russia, South Korea, and the United States, for the

sole reason of taking part in dealing with North Korea's nuclear threat. The negotiations had always been hosted in Beijing and chaired by China (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2016, 14 September, Serial No. 114-230).

Accordingly, after three years of suspension of the Six-Party Talks in February 2012, the Obama administration and North Korean government had direct dialogue. Positive developments followed and subsequently, the popular Leap Day Agreement was announced. The agreement that the United States and North Korea adopted on 29 February 2012 known as "leap day" agreement emphasized that the U.S. would make available 240,000 tons of considerable food aid to North Korea for assenting to the entry of IAEA inspectors into Yongbyon for inspections and also for agreeing to a moratorium on uranium enrichment and missile testing. This progress led to a resumption of the six-party talks (*The Economist* 2012).

Unfortunately, the upbeat development was effectively hampered when the North Korean new constitution adopted under Kim Jong Un's administration expressed and declared the country as a nuclear weapons state, which got worse when the new government launched a missile under the pretext of sending an earth observation satellite into orbit which took an Unha 3 rocket on board on April 13, 2012. This launching was carried out to commemorate the centenary of the birth of Kim Il-sung; national celebrations included the leadership drawing attention to external threats and highlighting arms build-ups, and also displaying of military might (Sang-hun and Myers 2012). However, this missile launch was reported as failure. With much arrogance, on 12 February 2013, the North Korean leadership decided and launched another missile. This third nuclear test was carried out to display perfection in the weapons technology vis-à-vis flight accuracy and flight stability, confirming the status of a nuclear power.

With changes in leadership in both the Koreas, one of the diplomatic and security primary targets by the Obama administration was to revive the North-South dialogue, which was suspended for some time. However, the nuclear issue still posed an impediment in realizing any political harmonizing between the North and the South. Moreover, Washington and Seoul was faced with tremendous challenges, most important being the prevention of

nuclear issue from developing into a test-case for the alliance. And thus, the aim of constructing a US-ROK cooperative framework was pivotal to defend South Korea and at the same time, to strengthen its military (The White House 2015, 16 October).

The idea was once the Six-Party Talks would recommence, it was indispensable that the priority would be shifted toward the symposium on issues relating to the lifting of sanctions on North Korea and provision of light water reactors. Experts were of the view that North Korea was bent on developing intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM). The level of achievement North Korea claimed to reach in terms of possessing fissile nuclear warheads was able to send quite alarming warnings, especially after the 12 December 2012 successful launch of the long-range Unha-3 rocket, on the pretext of sending a 'satellite' into orbit. The missile fired in December was a three-stage missile, somewhat similar to the Taepodong-2 missile which had an estimated range of more than 10,000 kilometres. The range of the missile could reach the west coast of the United States. It was an openly visible fact that North Korea was interested in provocation and forcing crisis to de-escalate into negotiation with the U.S. Pyongyang successfully launched its December 2012 rocket in disobedience to the UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions. This act of defiance prompted an outbreak of alarm among States in the region which called for their response, while reprimanding North Korea's aggravation. Regardless of the international uproar, the UNSC's decision to punish the country was voted down by China (United Nations Security Council 2013).

A Joint Vision for the Alliance between the United States and the Republic of Korea was reached in June 2009. The substantiation of this vision came in 2012 when the two countries held talks during President Obama's official visit to South Korea to be present at a nuclear security meeting which cemented security cooperation plans between the two countries and called on North Korea to discontinue its nuclear production. Both the countries also signed an agreement to set off an enduring strategic arrangement in the US-ROK Alliance. However, any security assistance the U.S. offered to Seoul would be done with much caution so that no negative impact was crafted in the security milieu in the Asia and Pacific region, also not to irritate China. Moreover, when it came to ballistic missile defence (BMD), Washington and the ROK still needed to continue the discussion. Among

many other contentions, one that China felt distrustful in the US-ROK alliance was the upgrading of ROK's ballistic missile capabilities (Obama and Myung-bak 2012).

At the regional stage, during a high-level meeting in 2012, Japan and South Korea agreed cohesion and cooperation over North Korea's nuclear tests (issue) through the trilateral Japan-US-ROK initiative (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2012).

The national defense blueprint that came out on 29 August 2012 which was the Defense Reform Plan 2012-2030 brought out by the Ministry of Defense of the ROK which laid down the security and defense guidelines. About this paper, qualms and questions were articulated if the ROK military joint operations with the US Forces Korea would work out successfully after the transfer of Operational control (OPCON). The ROK's ground- and ship-to-ground missiles capability got improved. And this was upgraded as desired by Seoul to high-altitude unmanned reconnaissance aircraft. This development was pursued by the purchase of ROK four MQ-4 Global Hawk high-altitude unmanned surveillance aircraft from the Americans. Also Seoul's military had always depended on the US Forces Korea when it came to C4ISR capability. However, as the security scenario changed with looming transfer of wartime OPCON to the ROK's JCS in 2015, it was deemed important by the South Korean military to develop its own domestic military capacity, in case of any external threat like from North Korea. According to the arrangement, the US Forces Korea and the South Korean military would be working together in an integrated manner under a CFC (which was already planned to be disbanded soon) commander. There were some sort of apprehension on the Korean Peninsula post-transfer of wartime OPCON and post-dissolution of the CFC (Park 2014).

Even President Obama's 2014 visit was perceived by allies such as South Korea and Malaysia as positive signal demonstrating assurance and camaraderie in securing peace and stability. Obama's visit to South Korea was intentionally utilized to reaffirm Washington's commitment and friendship more than to seek deliverables. At the summit, between President Obama and President Park Geun-hye, certain crucial diplomatic matters were discussed such as re-evaluate a further holdup of the transfer of the 2015 scheduled wartime operational control (OPCON) of South Korean forces back to South Korea from

the United States. In the backdrop, the North Korean nuclear test issue was looming. During the American President's visit to South Korea, in a reply to the reported indications of Pyongyang's preparation for a fourth nuclear test, President Obama and President Park Geun-hye together sent a tough and clear message that in case of provocation by North Korea in the future in any form would only be met with additional isolation and more concrete global response. During the joint press conference, both the leaders called upon China and stressed on the role China could play by cooperating with the U.S. and South Korea to deter North Korea's threats (Obama and Geun-hye 2014).

Furthermore, the two presidents - President Obama and President Park also affirmed that the trilateral cooperation between Washington, Seoul, and Tokyo was critical and obligatory to jointly form a strong front to respond to North Korea's nuclear and missile provocations. During the trip, Presidents of the United States and South Korea together took a joint trip to the U.S.-ROK Combined Forces of Command (CFC) for the first time ever since its creation in 1978 in order to express U.S.-ROK joint defense capabilities and commitment against North Korea (Kim 2014).

The change in leadership in the United States (President Obama) and South Korea (President Park Geun-hye) was anticipated to improve the situation. South Korea definitely sought guidance and cooperation on security matters from the United States like active deterrence capabilities against North Korea and the institution of a new US-ROK coordinating apparatus following the termination of the Combined Forces Command (CFC) in 2015 (The White House 2015, 16 October).

Furthermore, in June 2016, the three countries conducted the first trilateral missile-defense exercise off the coast of Hawaii. Despite the challenges, all these were signified attempts to improve relations between Japan and South Korea with the help of Washington (Parameswaran 2016).

As a result of the increasing nuclear and multiple ballistic missile threats from North Korea and also as an act of assurance, the Obama administration under its rebalancing efforts agreed to deploy the "Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile battery to U.S. Forces Korea". The deployment of THAAD was meant to defend and protect South

Korea against threats from the North Korean regime, according to a Defense Department statement on 7 July 2016. While the Obama administration was focusing on keeping its promises to protect its important ally (South Korea), this acted as an agent to increased tension and arms race in the Asia-Pacific. The US Army Pacific reforms took under consideration the importance to preserve and reinforce deterrence of North Korea's long-range artillery. The security issues over the region covered quite a huge range of matters starting from the Afghanistan issue till the North Korean nuclear dilemma (Department of Defense 2016).

Natural Disasters

The Asia-Pacific region, defined by a variety of landscape, has been prone to natural disasters such as earthquake, tsunamis, drought, pandemics, volcanic eruptions, typhoons, nuclear disaster, etc. The US had been assisting at different levels – from conducting emergency rescue (SAR) operations to bringing in relief supplies to USAID conducting joint disaster assessments with the victim countries. The US had a role in training and equipping the states, civil organisations and regional NGOs to coordinate and increase their capabilities to respond swiftly to disasters and have greater resilience (Department of Defense 2015).

Piracy

The Obama administration became a member of the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) in 2014. The Asia-Pacific region, which has important international maritime trade routes such as the Indian Ocean trade routes, Malacca Straits, and East and South China Sea, needs to be protected. Incidents of piracy had been registered. Stronger mechanisms to counter piracy in this region are crucial (ICC 2015).

Terrorism

When it comes to terrorism as a regional challenge, Asia-Pacific region has become even more vulnerable with the rise of ISIS. Many of the countries in the region faces the brutality of terrorism but with limited instrument, porous borders, weak law enforcement

and poor coordination of information to tackle the problem at the regional level. The Obama administration joined the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) counterterrorism exercises in 2013 for the first time. The US Pacific Command had also worked with countries in the region to counter terrorism (ASEAN Asian Defence Ministers' Meeting 2016).

The United States National Security Interests

National security interest acts as one of the main driving forces behind the United States' time-honoured record of engagement in the Asia-Pacific region. It should also be noted that U.S. interest in Asia and Pacific is not a fresh event or a passing phase. Some points describing the national security interests of the Obama administration are notable: first of all, protecting and safeguarding the U.S. homeland, territories, citizens, interests and allies. Secondly, the U.S. government being the super power considered it its responsibility to maintain stability in the region. Therefore, it was interested in achieving regional stability and also in the prevention of any overriding power or group of powers that might pose threat to U.S. interests or access (The White House 2010, May; Cossa et al. 2009). Thirdly, Washington explicitly proclaimed that it aspired for a proliferation-free worldwide nuclear order which ensured a stable and secure global environment. Fourthly, the Obama administration and even Bush administration both had shown interests in promoting free trade and free flow of goods. Market access and regional opulence were continuously highlighted. Fifthly, to Washington it made an important priority to guarantee freedom of navigation on international waters. This was aimed at making possible the achievement of regional stability and further American strategic interests. Sixthly, throughout the history of the United States, it had stood for democratic values. Even the Obama administration went on to promote the international standards and norms including democratic values, good governance, religious freedom, and human rights (The White House 2010, May; Cossa et al. 2009).

Kurt M. Campbell, who served as Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, had stated that it was high time that the United States recognized the countries in the Southeast Asian region and desired better relations with them and the neighbouring

rising power – China. He also pointed out that this strategic realisation has to do simply with geography, not necessarily with geo-strategic concerns. He went on to clarify that it was much distinct from the bipolar divide during the cold war, the smaller countries in the region required developing and maintaining firm ties with both China and the United States. This would help sustain Washington's presence and prominence in the region. Also America's liaison with Beijing would prove to be a highly complex one. Furthermore, the engagement between Washington and Beijing would go on to be a critical factor in maintaining and handling security and economic issues in this 21st century. Campbell also mentioned that democratic values such as human rights would definitely affect Obama administration's policy towards China on security and economic matters (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2011, 31 March, Serial No. 112 – 15).

In this perception, there was, furthermore, a recognition that policy-makers must be cautious not to have a narrow outlook by focusing just on the bilateral China-US relationship. A chunk of the problem was the overemphasis on the big powers at the expense of the smaller powers. The National Security Strategy (NSS) report of 2010 of the U.S. government, thus, reflected the rationale behind Obama administration's strategic objectives and results in the Asia-Pacific region (The White House 2010, May). This document expressed that Washington employed a "whole of government approach" to protect and achieve America's national security interests. Dynamic engagement beyond America's border was a vital instrument in securing U.S. national security objectives by using collective efforts. The cornerstone of the engagement was the relationship that was formed and maintained between the U.S. and its allies and friends in various regions of the world including Asia. The relations between the U.S. and Asia would be founded on "shared interests and shared values" which served America's "mutual security and the broader security and prosperity of the world" (The White House 2010, May).

The rebalance policy of the Obama administration was seen as a coherent expansion of important documents including the NSS report 2010 where all the different elements of power of the U.S. – diplomacy, economic growth, development and cooperation with its allies and partners on security issues, added to America's military capability – were put together to present a comprehensive plan for delivering U.S. security objectives. The

strategy highlighted the significance of American allies and partners such as Australia, South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, India and Thailand (The White House 2010, May; Moens and Smith-Windsor 2016).

The *National Military Strategy 2011* was published by the Department of Defense describing how the Obama administration should execute its foreign policy goals to maintain and secure America's national security interests. The document emphasized the vitality of preserving and upholding America's relations with allies and partners even when conflicts arise with other nations. The document also pushed American military to form a "wider and more constructive partnership" with its allies and partners – Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and several countries in Oceania – to support America's foreign policy goals, while building cooperative relations with China. It also mentioned about the two rising world powers – China and India – alongside several other consequential regional powers in Asia, and how America was to be engaged with the region even by giving emphasis to regional and multilateral forums like ASEAN and others (Department of Defense 2011). It also stated:

“Military power and our Nation's other instruments of statecraft are more effective when applied in concert... In this multi-nodal world, the military's contribution to American leadership must be about more than power – it must be about our approach to exercising power” (Department of Defense 2011).

In January 2012, the Department of Defense elucidated in its strategic document *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* that the U.S. military posture would shift and rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region which was inevitable while, at the same time, the military would maintain to contribute to the global security. The document also stated that America's relationships with its allies and important partners in the Asia-Pacific region were decisive in maintaining growth and stability of the region in the coming years. The document also reaffirmed that America would give emphasis to its existing alliances which provided “a vital foundation for Asia-Pacific security”. It also explained that it was critical to enlarge U.S. networks of cooperation with rising partners throughout

the region in order to make sure that “collective capability and capacity for securing common interests” existed (Department of Defense 2012).

Expert analysis pointed out that:

“At the heart of these geopolitical equations is a major power shift toward China, with significant ramifications for regional balance of power, alliances, international institutions, and world order in the early 21st century. The struggle for dominance over “contested commons” (maritime, cyber and outer space) is intensifying. Strategic concerns loom large as China’s growing ambition power and reach run up against the interests of old, established powers” (Moens and Smith-Windsor 2016).

Further asserting the importance of military-security dimension in the region, the report *Setting Priorities for American Leadership: A New National Security Strategy for the United States*, published in 2013, stated:

“U.S. military’s global pre-eminence is vital to both protecting American values and interests and providing the infrastructure for integrating American values and interests and providing the infrastructure for integrating the efforts of other allies and partners” (Goldgeier and Volker 2013).

The same report continued to state that America must carry on maintaining its own core strengths to become more efficient in performing an international leadership role by upholding the values of a liberal, democratic global order. Among other elements of its core strengths, one of the most important elements is maintaining the world’s most developed hi-tech military and national security equipment. It also said that the American military ability also extended to engaging and working with allies and partners at both the regional and global levels to preserve efficient as well as interoperable abilities. Also, a strong military capability could be maintained by utilizing America’s limited resources in a prudent manner and to the maximum result, by deciding where and how to spend them, this should be supported by pulling in military resources of allies and partners to complement the US military power (Goldgeier and Volker 2013).

This 2013 report also stated that the U.S. made up for a huge portion of the total defense spending of the world and thus, shelled out excessively for world's security framework. For instance, Washington's defense expenditure was six times that of Beijing's. However, as the most powerful country, to continue pursuing its interests with respect to allies and opponents alike, the U.S. needed a formidable military strength and presence even in the Asia-Pacific region. Even if the U.S. reduced its defense spending, the U.S. should make sure that the cuts were not very severe. Instead, the strategic ambitions should be clear and the defense budget should reflect the importance of maintaining America's military preeminence. Reduction in the U.S. defense spending should go alongside a strategy for escalating America's defense resources in the long-term (Goldgeier and Volker 2013). It was a clear imperative for the US to protect its security interests by employing the most applicable strategic policy options in order to dissuade potential military competitor(s).

Towards this end, the United States gave importance to maintaining relations with Japan and South Korea, keeping in mind, China which had always visibly appeared in the US foreign policy (Agnew 2012).

During the second term of the Obama administration, the change in leaderships and regimes in many important nations in the region influenced the rebalance policy, starting with President Barack Obama's re-election; Republic of Korea (South Korea) saw the victory of the conservative Saenuri Party in the 2012 presidential elections with Park Geun-hye elected as the new president; Communist Party of China (CPC) voted for the commencement of the new leadership headed by Xi Jinping as the new general secretary; President Vladimir Putin also came back to power in Russia, in North Korea Kim Jong-un succeeded the deceased Kim Jong-il, Thailand's coup by the military, the Philippines new President Rodrigo Duterte coming into power, and election of India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi. These developments certainly changed the political, economic and military dynamics in the Asia and the Pacific region affecting the course of the rebalance policy, some positively and others negatively. Notably, the rebalance policy was poised to strengthen compatible countries (to the United States) such as South Korea, Japan, Thailand, India, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam and Australia, in terms of security partnerships (Department of State 2010, 12 January).

The Quadrennial Defense Review 2014 (QDR 2014) represented a fact-filled document explaining what the defence aspect of the rebalance would look like. The document, right from the start, delved into how the U.S. was facing a swiftly shifting security environment. It explained the U.S. government's resolve to reposition its focus on the various strategic challenges and opportunities that America would be facing in the future. These included emerging challenges and opportunities due to new centers of power, new technologies and a global condition which is faced with increasing unpredictable and volatile environment. All these challenges constituted a threat to America's security and stability and to its allies and partners around the world, as the challenges continued to be dynamic and impulsive, for instance, threats originating from regimes like North Korea in the Asia-Pacific region. In an era that is rapidly modernizing and technologically advancing, the American security situation at home and abroad were seen to be threatened, even if the U.S. military was the most well-equipped power in the world, by warfare on different levels - in the air, sea, space domains and cyberspace (Department of Defense 2014). The document stated:

“To protect the security interests of the United States most effectively while recognizing the fiscal imperative of deficit reduction, the President's FY2015 Budget reduces projected defense budgets by about \$113 billion over five years compared to levels requested in the FY2014 Budget. It reflects the strict constraints on discretionary funding required by the Bipartisan Budget Act in FY2015, but it does not accept sequestration levels thereafter, funding the Department at about \$115 billion more than projected sequestration levels through 2019” (Department of Defense 2014).

The QDR 2014 demonstrated the defense priorities of the U.S. in the 21st century and the need for increased resource approval by the Congress and allocation by the administration. These priorities encompassed all the elements that would contribute to the formation of the rebalancing policy to the Asia-Pacific region. The policy was aimed at exhibiting its commitment and sustainability as also at preserving peace and maintaining stability in the region, among other priorities. The Department of Defense under Obama had three strategic pillars: firstly, prevent and conquer assault on the United States and thereby, protect the homeland from potential attacks and natural disasters. Secondly, preserve regional and international stability by building international security system which would

deter adversaries, maintain strong relations with allies and partners, and cooperate with others to handle common security challenges together. Thirdly, project American power and prevail resolutely. The document went on to affirm that the efforts of the government would help the U.S. in defeating aggression, annihilate terrorist networks, as well as offer humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. As the importance of the Asia-Pacific region increased, defense spending in this region would grow (Department of Defense 2014).

Meanwhile, smaller powers in the region continued to augment their military capabilities and security needs, there were higher chances of tensions escalating over long-standing territorial and resource rich areas. This was thought to lead to disruptive inevitable competition, or, explode into conflict. For instance, China's fast-paced military transformation combined with a relative lack of openness and transparency regarding both military capabilities and targets heightened tension in the region (Wickett et al. 2015).

The U.S. placed faith in multilateral security architectures such as the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and other regional powers and structures that were working together on matters – humanitarian assistance, maritime security, counterterrorism – as they emerged to assist in managing tensions and preventing conflict. North Korea, with its closed and authoritarian regime, continued to pose great threat to the security and stability of the Korean Peninsula and Northeast region of Asia, and it was also becoming a growing, direct threat to the United States. North Korea's long-range missile and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs in its quest for nuclear power status, which had infringed international obligations, was a present danger (Clinton 2010, 23 July).

As the chances of proliferation of high-tech missile technology and WMD capabilities to new actors increased, challenges to the U.S. military's defense of the homeland increased. Thus, the Quadrennial Defense Review 2014 (QDR 2014) suggested that the U.S. must be ready to confront limited ballistic missile threats from regional actors like North Korea in Asia, and prevent the threats before it was too late. To prevent any disaster on a large scale, the U.S. needed to cooperate and coordinate with Japan, the ROK, China, and Russia by means of military and diplomatic channels to maintain peace and security on the Korean Peninsula, thereby, reassuring America's allies and partners, and preserving strategic

stability with Russia and China. The document also emphasized on the role of the U.S. to use its nuclear capability to deter nuclear threats on it and its partners and allies. The document further stated that the American government should upgrade and modernize its defence capabilities, posture and relationships across the region in the Asia-Pacific and help the partners and allies in enhancing their capabilities as well as in areas ranging from missile defense, cyber security to space resilience to maritime security and disaster relief (Department of Defense 2014).

Even with China, the Department of Defense revealed that it was investing in “building a sustained and substantive dialogue” with the People’s Liberation Army and find ways to cooperate in “concrete, practical areas such as counter-piracy, peacekeeping, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief”. Washington also was advised to give importance to initiatives to develop regional peace and stability which was in line with international norms and principles. The initiatives would consist of supporting efforts to build trilateral engagements and exercises, to strengthen ASEAN’s fundamental role in the region through involvement in regional security architectures like the ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting-Plus. The U.S. Department of Defense committed its efforts to continue lending help to stabilize Central and Southwest Asia. It also echoed the Obama administration’s pledge to support South Asia and the Indian Ocean region in maintaining stability and peace as these regions continue to be critical in the successful implementation of the rebalance policy. The QDR 2014 also stated that the United States backed “India’s rise as an increasingly capable actor in the region”, and therefore, Washington desired to deepen the U.S.-Indo strategic ties, through such partnership as the Defense Trade and Technology Initiative (Department of Defense 2014).

While the international and regional security scenario intensified during the last few years with the intensification of China’s claims over both East and South China Sea, North Korea rapid offensive militarization with more nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities (Li 2014), Russia’s Ukraine crisis, the rise of Islamic State of Iraq, dysfunction in Congress; the rebalance forward posture and resources was affected leading to experts questioning Washington’s capability and commitment to the Asia-Pacific region. While on the other hand, a majority staff report prepared for the use of the committee on foreign relations in

2014 discussed the imbalance of the rebalancing efforts, and therefore, the policy's struggles. It explained how the military features of the strategy moved forward while leaving behind the non-military aspects like increasing civilian engagement, empowering the U.S. businesses, and strengthening diplomatic partnerships (U.S. Congressional Hearing, A Majority Staff Report 2014).

Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter laid down the components of the defense dimension of the Asia-Pacific rebalance under the Obama administration,

“First, we will continue to invest in future capabilities that will be especially relevant to the Asia-Pacific’s complex and dynamic security environment. Next, we are now fielding in numbers key capabilities we have developed over the past decade – capabilities that are suited for the Asia-Pacific now and for years to come. And we’re finding new ways to use existing weapons systems. Third, we’re adapting our overall defense posture in the region to be geographically distributed, operationally resilient, and politically sustainable. We’re also rotating air and naval assets throughout the region. In addition, we’ve maintained out there an increased tempo of training and exercises. Everything I just discussed – the investments, the capabilities, and the posture – helps us with our fourth line of effort: which is reinforcing the partnerships and alliances that are the bedrock of everything we do in the Asia-Pacific” (Carter 2015).

When it came to matters of engagement, the traditional lack of focus and engagement of the United States with the Southeast Asian countries, Washington realised the importance of beefing up commitment in the region like its focussed attention in Northeast Asia. The Obama administration also openly admitted that defending American interest in light of increasing Chinese aggression was and had been a tough a combination of competition and cooperation (Connelly 2015). One analysis pointed out:

“However, the administration also failed to convince sceptics that the rebalance was not an attempt to contain China. In this, the administration shares some blame. The Pentagon under the Obama administration has occasionally described the rebalance and its increased military engagement with security partners in the region — partnerships that are intended to achieve a broad range of security goals — in terms that suggest it is merely an effort to counter China, rather than a more sophisticated effort to build partnerships and patterns of interaction with the militaries of the region” (Connelly 2015).

Furthermore, experts like Peter W. Singer, a senior fellow and director of the 21st Century Defense Initiative at The Brookings Institution, had a positive view of the military aspect of the rebalance policy, even if there was sequestration. He stated:

“...We can see that the “gap between the U.S. military and our closest rivals” will not “collapse.” The gap will close, which should worry us, but these rivals still have a long way to go. Nor will cuts “destroy” the U.S. military upon which our allies’ security also depends... And finally, it is hard to square how sequestration would “invite aggression.” A weaker U.S. force would be available to deter and fight foes, but by no means fundamentally changed... Sequestration is an outcome that would be quite negative for the U.S., and hopefully Congress will show the maturity to avoid it” (Singer 2012).

Also, the military part of the rebalance seemed to have remained on course, even after the sequestration as facts showed, more than all the uproar about rebalance strategy being declared completely dead in the Asia-Pacific region. Some of the few pointers of this argument would be, such as, the then U.S. Secretary Ashton Carter’s official visit to Japan and South Korea as soon as he entered office, showing Pentagon’s priority to the region; between South Korea and Japan over 80,000 U.S. military personnel were hosted that formed the majority of forward deployed forces in the Western Pacific as compared to 65,000 American forces deployed to Europe and around 35,000 stationed in the Middle East; in April 2015, Washington and Tokyo agreed on the new Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation; in July 2016, Washington and Seoul agreed to deploy the THAAD system to defend and protect the security of the Republic of Korea; the Department of Defense continued to position 60 percent of its Air Force and Navy Force strength in the Asia-Pacific region by the year 2020 “with 55 percent of the Navy’s 289 ships, including 60 percent of its submarine fleet, already based across Asia from being primarily in Okinawa to having a presence in mainland Japan, Australia, Guam, and Hawaii” (Davidson and Dickey 2015).

The U.S.-Australia Force Posture Agreement, which was in place, guaranteed 2,500 Marines rotate yearly through Darwin for the following twenty-five years and also the continued representation of American military and intelligence at Australian facilities. The

U.S.-Australia Framework Partnership Agreement was also still intact. The U.S. signed the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) with the Philippines. Added to the efforts to rebalance U.S. forces in the region, Washington also pushed to ensure the availability of the most up-to-date cutting-edge technology in Asia before use in any other region (Davidson and Dickey 2015).

The region saw major deployments of the *Zumwalt*-class destroyer and the most recent *Virginia*-class submarine, the principle basing for the advanced F-22 and the announcement to deploy the F-35 in 2017, enhanced rotation of the U.S. Air Force and Navy airborne warning and control systems (AWACS), the advanced P-8 maritime patrol aircraft getting introduced, and Washington also replaced the *USS George Washington* with the enhanced *Ronald Reagan*. The Obama administration also held several multilateral military exercises with Asian countries which ranged from the annual Cobra Gold exercise to the biannual Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC), along with more than twenty-two American allies and partners, including China in 2015, Southeast Asia Cooperation and Training (SEACAT), Southeast Asian Cooperation Afloat and Readiness Training (CARAT) and Operation Malabar, a bilateral exercise between the U.S. and India (status upgraded in 2015) (Davidson and Dickey 2015).

As China's provocation and aggressive behaviour became more prominent in the South China Sea and awareness of that grew in the U.S., Congress and amongst the experts, the importance of the rebalance policy was recognized. This was evident as the bill on Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Initiative Act of 2016 was introduced by senators to authorise the Secretary of State to provide foreign military financial assistance and global military and education training activities in the Asia and Pacific region for building maritime security and stability along with necessary capabilities (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2016, 27 April, S.2865).

On the Japan front Shinzo Abe administration was known to push for widening of Japan's security role to protect the country against both internal threats and external threats/missions. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was able to gain support of the Japanese lawmakers to reinterpret Article 9 of the constitution in 2015 to facilitate Japan's right to "collective self-defence". His party was also able to gain majority in both the houses of the

Japanese parliament by 2016. This made him even stronger to pursue his vision to expand Japanese self-defence force. The Obama administration was in favour of the move as it supported the objectives of the rebalance efforts to strengthen military alliance and presence in the Asia-Pacific region. Nonetheless, the controversial amendment was met with opposition from the domestic population, South Korea (an important neighbour) and China (BBC 2017).

Added to this was another controversial visit to the Yasukuni Shrine in 2013 by Prime Minister Abe. It worried the Obama administration as Abe administration used to talk about “shedding the husk of the postwar state” and “recover Japan’s independence”. The shrine also represented pre-1945, fascist and “greater East Asian” picture. All these drew much disapproval from the Obama administration. Since then, Prime Minister Abe never mentioned again about relieving Japan of post-war burdens nor repeated the same blunder of visiting the shrine. But, he increasingly pushed for “positive pacifism” (McCormack 2016).

Overall, it was a favourable phenomenon that many Asia-Pacific states had experienced at least one or more peaceful regime transitions in this 21st century as mentioned before. Countries such as Burma in the region were absorbing and embracing democratic forms of societies with free and fair elections. These changes were taking roots into their systems by becoming the rule all through the region. Such waves of change that were taking place throughout the region was highly significant and favourable for strengthening security and stability. For instance, Burma’s impressively improved relation with the United States was a positive development (Xu and Albert 2016).

Nonetheless, there still existed dilemma created by some groups of people and power like in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, which represented the non-democratic front which could be a destabilizing factor in the security of the countries/region in the Asia-Pacific, for instance, as support for political volatility, terrorism, etc rose (Besant 2016). All these also factored in America’s national security concerns and therefore, the need to engage more.

Congressional Perceptions and Approaches of the Military Aspects

On the domestic front, for a successful implementation of this forward military posture and engagement, a strong bipartisan congressional support and approval was indispensable for funding of adequate resources and discovering potential new initiatives. Analysts rightly pointed out saying, “the gap between the Obama administration and the US Congress on Asia-Pacific policy is a product of both the general decline of Congress as an institution and the specific decline of Asia expertise among its members” (Connelly 2015). Many of the members of the Congress lacked knowledge to understand the importance of viewing the region through a broader regional strategic standpoint. When it came to the Asia-Pacific region, the Armed Services Committees also would look at the U.S.-China competition most of the times. Also, the indiscriminate cuts that began to take effect in 2013 were divided equally between defense and non-defense spending. As many experts feared that the sequestration, which was an austerity fiscal plan as an outcome of the Budget Control Act of 2011 (BCA), would affect the military aspect of the rebalance policy. Despite efforts to lift sequestration, it continued to be in place till the end of the administration. Connelly also pointed out that “the compromise reached on engagement with Myanmar’s military is one indication that attitudes toward Asia-Pacific policy may be undergoing a slight shift in Congress” (Connelly 2015).

Even if there were no force reductions in the Pacific as there had been in other commands in other regions, the sequestration in the “overall defense procurement and training budgets” affected U.S. forces in the Asia–Pacific region in a negative manner, as the military in the Asia-Pacific region needed sufficient funds to maintain requisite forces in the long term and upgrade the quality of those forces to sustain readiness and modernization. Assistant Secretary of Defense for Acquisition Katrina G. McFarland agreed in March 2014 that the pivot/rebalance policy to Asia was “being looked at again, because candidly it can not happen” due to defense budget cuts (Klingner 2015). Some of the significant Congressional hearings listed below, show the intense scrutiny by lawmakers on this policy and their impact.

At the hearing on “Rebalance to Asia II: Security and Defense; Cooperation and Challenges” before the Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Committee

on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, One Hundred Thirteenth Congress, First Session, on 25 April 2013, Senator Benjamin L. Cardin (Dem. from Maryland), who presided the hearing as chairman of the subcommittee, in the opening statement stated that the Asia-Pacific region has been “undergoing a significant transition with signs of security dilemmas and potential arms races”. He went on to affirm that the hearing was being held at the right time as he named the various crisis escalating in the region such as rising threat of North Korea, the ever-increasing occurrence of cyber attacks that had become a foremost concern on America’s security interests, and the escalating maritime tensions in both the East and South China Seas which were accompanied by piracy and other transnational crime. He went on to suggest that the U.S must deepen its military-to-military dialogue with China so as to “address many of the sources of the insecurity” between Washington and Beijing (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2013, 25 April, S. HRG. 113-138).

On the North Korean issue, Benjamin L. Cardin said that U.S. must “remain vigilant and take threats seriously while not rewarding bad behavior”. He also insisted that the U.S. should ratify the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) even without Senate ratification and adhere to UNCLOS practice, which is an important mechanism based on rules and international order which could help maintain stability and security of the disputed waters in region. He further stated that America’s rebalance policy also “must embrace critical military-to-military programs to help professionalize the East Asian region's militaries to better address regional challenges” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2013, 25 April, S. HRG. 113-138).

At the hearing on, “Rebalance to Asia II: Security and Defense; Cooperation and Challenges”, before the Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, One Hundred Thirteenth Congress, first session, on 25 April 2013, Senator Marco Rubio (Rep. from Florida), reminded that the Obama administration promised to bring changes to the U.S. security commitments in the Asia-Pacific region by introducing things that were new and innovative which would be considered game changers in engaging the region. The senator also repeated the points that the witnesses remarked and restated that “the United States has long been a Pacific power”,

and he also supported the idea that strengthening America's existing alliances with Australia, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan was critical and should be continued and that the U.S. should play the role of helping these partners in strengthening their relationships between themselves. He also highlighted that it was "a good time to reinvest in relationships with India", and integrate India's security concerns into America's regional engagement in the region (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2013, 25 April, S. HRG. 113-138).

During the hearing titled "United States Defense Policy Issues Pertaining to the Asia-Pacific Theater" before the Committee on Armed Services, United States Senate, One Hundred Fourteenth Congress, First Session on 14 April 2015, Senator and Chairman John McCain (Rep. from Arizona) agreed that the rebalance policy might be a new foreign policy, however, America's "national interests in the Asia-Pacific are deep and enduring". He also reminded that the U.S. must make it a priority to "continue to sustain a favorable military balance in the region" and that the U.S. government must also not continue to "live with mindless sequestration and a broken acquisition system" but make efforts to "merge new concepts of operations with emerging military technology to enable" American "military to operate in contested environments" such as in the vast Asia-Pacific region (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 14 April, Issue: Vol. 161, No. 53).

Senator McCain also mentioned the letter that was written to the then Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter and the then Secretary of State John Kerry on 19 March 2015 regarding China's strategy in the South China in concert with his colleagues including Senators Jack Reed (Dem. from Rhode Island), Bob Corker (Rep. from Tennessee), and Bob Menendez (Dem. from New Jersey) that "the United States must work together with like-minded partners and allies to develop and employ a comprehensive strategy that aims to shape China's coercive peacetime behavior", and he also stated that China hasn't behaved as a "responsible stakeholder" in the region. In this hearing, U.S. Senator Jack Reed (Dem. from Rhode Island), Ranking Member gave the opening statement to receive testimony on "U.S. Defense Policy Issues Pertaining to the Asia-Pacific Theater". He said that the Obama administration used the rebalance policy to place the U.S. in a strategic position in

the region for a long time, however, more work needed to be done (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 14 April, Issue: Vol. 161, No. 53).

On 17 September 2015, U.S. Senator Jack Reed (Dem. from Rhode Island), Ranking Member, gave the opening statement before Senate Armed Services Committee on “Maritime Security Strategy in the Asia-Pacific Region”. He apprised the committee that over the last few years, China militarized the land features in the South China Sea, alarming the countries of the region, by constructing airstrips and surveillance towers – all these representing potential threats to destabilize the region. He also stated that the U.S. had made attempts to “decrease tension between the U.S. Navy and the Chinese Navy through the establishment of new risk reduction mechanisms such as engagement rules for air and maritime safety”, but these efforts did not prove to have had any substantial impact on Chinese confrontational behavior in the South China Sea. Jack Reed also stated North Korea’s increased nuclear arsenal in “quality and quantity” which was becoming a huge destabilizing factor in the region (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 17 September, S. HRG. 114-214).

Chairman John McCain (Rep. from Arizona), while giving the opening statement on “Maritime Security Strategy in the Asia-Pacific” on 17 September 2015, stated that the U.S. national interests in the Asia-Pacific region remained “deep and enduring”. He said that it was in the interest of America “to maintain a balance of power” that promoted peaceful expansion of free commons in the realms of air, sea, space and cyber, among many others which the U.S. shared with the nations of the region. He also verified that China had benefitted in a big way from the existence of a peaceful regional order in the region. He continued to emphasize that under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, Chinese aggressive actions increased which made many doubt about China’s peaceful rise in the changing power dynamics in the region and its stability. He also underscored the fact that Chinese military strength and capability had been modernized in which advanced systems projected power to counter the U.S. military capabilities and deny America’s access and operation in the Western Pacific region – a direct attack to America’s interests,

accompanied by the rise of cyber attacks targeted at the U.S. at home (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 17 September, S. HRG. 114-214).

John McCain went on to remind the committee of the declaration of the air defense identification zone over large parts of the East China Sea in which territories claimed by South Korea and Japan in 2013 and stated that, in view of China's increased militarized activities in the land features of the South China Sea, China's capability and probability to declare and enforce an air defense identification zone in the this disputed water increased by using coercion, intimidation and even force. And that this behavior of the Chinese government was rejected by the U.S. However, China did not allow American Navy ships to enter and operate within 12 nautical miles of its reclaimed islands in the South China Sea. And to this problem, Senator McCain suggested that the U.S. should "conduct freedom of navigation operations within 12 nautical miles of China's reclaimed islands in the South China Sea". He insisted that the U.S. must think "anew about deterrence" and leave no gap between words and actions but employ "new and emerging technologies", enhance forward-deployed forces and carry on to support American allies and partners in the region to "project power over long distances and operate in contested environments" (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 17 September, S. HRG. 114-214).

Rebalance policy recognized threats emanating from North Korea and it was a part of the policy to attempt to avert the challenges. At the 114th Congress 2nd session, the bill, H. R. 4501 to "amend the North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004 to authorize further actions to promote freedom of information and democracy in North Korea, and for other purposes" was introduced in the House of Representatives on 9 February 2016 by Senator Matt Salmon and was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2016, 9 February, H.Res. 4501). This was a bipartisan bill which called for increasing attempts to disseminate external information in North Korea through various non-conventional methods such as micro SD cards, USB drives and various high-tech means, apart from media and radios (Jae-soon 2016).

Then, in the 114TH Congress 2nd session, Senator Matt Salmon (Republican) submitted H.

RES. 634 in the Senate which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs on 2 March 2016. The title was “Recognizing the importance of the United States-Republic of Korea-Japan trilateral relationship to counter North Korean threats and nuclear proliferation, and to ensure regional security and human rights”. And on 7 September 2016, the resolution was “on motion to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, as amended agreed to by voice vote” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2016, 7 September, H. RES. 634).

Senator Benjamin L. Cardin (Dem. from Maryland) introduced S.2865 – Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Initiative Act of 2016 – in Senate on 27 April 2016 and the bill was read two times after which it was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations. The bill authorized “the Department of Defense (DOD) to establish the Maritime Security Initiative to provide assistance and training through September 30, 2022, for maritime security and domain awareness for countries in the Asia-Pacific region” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2016, 27 April, S.2865).

Elaboration of the Asia-Pacific Strategy by Obama Administration

The Senate Hearing, “Rebalance to Asia II: Security and Defense; Cooperation and Challenges”, before the Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, first session was held on 25 April 2013. Joseph Y. Yun, Acting Assistant Secretary, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, Washington, DC, thanked the subcommittee for putting in effort to build bipartisan consensus on the U.S. engagement in the Asia-Pacific region. According to Yun, America’s response to security threats like the North Korean problem demonstrated that there seem to be “no uncertainty about United States military and defense resolve in responding to security challenges in the region”. He affirmed that the close cooperation that the U.S. enjoyed with Japan “on consolidation and realignment issues” of the U.S. forces in the region sought to “maintain a sustainable military presence and preserve peace and security in the region”. He also insisted that as Washington tried to enhance its partnership with the countries in the region, American security assistance/funds through the Department of Defense such as foreign military financing, FMF, and international military education and training, IMET were critical and as the U.S. supported to “build local

capacity to deal with threats and disasters, and to promote democratic values” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2013, 25 April, S. HRG. 113-138).

David F. Helvey, Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asia, Office of Security and Defense, U.S. Department of Defense, Washington, DC, testified at the same hearing (as above) and argued that the Department of Defense's approach is centered on America's “network of alliances and partnerships” in the Asia-Pacific region, and that with the help of the allies and partners in the region including Australia, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, India and New Zealand, the U.S. would work to “reinvigorate and modernize” the relationships “to ensure they remain relevant to the challenges” that the U.S. might face in the years to come. He also stated that the U.S. gave equal measure of importance to strengthening multilateral security partnerships throughout the Asia and the Pacific region “to strengthen habits of cooperation and to promote trust and transparency and to build regional capacity”. And this was to be achieved by increasing “funding for regional exercises” and America's “support for participation by developing countries in multilateral training and exercise programs” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2013, 25 April, S. HRG. 113-138).

David F. Helvey went on to elaborate that the United States-China relationship was another part that was central to the U.S. overall rebalance efforts. He said that Washington wanted to pursue “a more sustained and substantive military-to-military relationship” on a continuous basis with China. He also added that even if Taiwan is not an ally of the U.S., its relationship with the U.S. is important to “the preservation of stability in the Taiwan Strait” and was fundamental to America's interests in the region in the promotion of peace and prosperity. He continued to state that the U.S. efforts to enhance its defense posture in the region formed the second element of America's defense strategy in Asia. Washington committed to develop a defense posture which was “more geographically distributed, operationally resilient, and politically sustainable”. He emphasized that a few of the key efforts that could be mentioned in this regard included America's “efforts to enhance missile defense posture by deploying the second radar to Japan and the deployment of a

Terminal High-Altitude Air Defense system, or THAAD, to Guam” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2013, 25 April, S. HRG. 113-138).

David F. Helvey went on to describe the third element of America’s defense strategy in Asia which was shifting Washington’s “long-term capacity investments toward the Asia-Pacific region”. To this, he said that the U.S. prioritized its investments in the budget “to develop platforms and capabilities that have a direct applicability and use in the Asia-Pacific region”. The investments that he mentioned included programs like the P-8 maritime patrol aircraft, Virginia class nuclear-powered submarine, air dominance and strike capabilities such as the fifth generation Joint Strike Fighter, the Broad Area Maritime Sensor, a new stealth bomber, and the KC-46 tanker replacement. David F. Helvey pointed out that the final element of Washington’s defense strategy in the region was to promote “a continued commitment to those principles” which the U.S. believed to be essential in “building a safe and secure world where all can prosper”. Such principles included America’s commitment “to free and open commerce, open access to the air, maritime, space, and cyberspace domains, adherence to the rule of law, and to the principle of settling disputes through peaceful means without coercion” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2013, 25 April, S. HRG. 113-138).

Daniel Russel, Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, in his testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific on 5 February 2014 on the subject “Maritime Disputes in East Asia”, thanked Chairman Chabot and the Subcommittee for lending their continued support to the American government’s focus in the Asia-Pacific region and said that they had contributed to “the rich bipartisan tradition” of increased engagement which helped in advancing American interests in the region. He stated that due to the region’s global and regional significance and strategic repercussions, the Obama administration had put the policy in place since 2010 and continued to pursue “sustained engagement in the Asia-Pacific a strategic priority” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2014, 5 February, Serial No. 113 – 123).

Russel was essentially answering Congressional concern on how the US was going to tackle tensions relating to maritime and territorial disputes that were on the rise. The disputes in the waters reflected China's incremental effort to assert control over the area contained in the so-called "nine-dash line". Along with other measures, Russel stated that "military presence by the United States, including by strengthening and modernizing" of America's alliances and were vital to continue building "robust strategic partnerships" and those efforts remained essential to maintaining regional stability. He even stressed that "building a strong and cooperative relationship with China to advance peace and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific" was essential (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2014, 5 February, Serial No. 113 – 123).

At the hearing on "United States Defence Policy Issues Pertaining to the Asia-Pacific Theater", Retired Admiral Gary Roughead, Annenberg Distinguished Visiting Fellow, Hoover Institution, gave his testimony. He stated that the Indian Ocean region had become an important region where the U.S. should be ready to go in, even as the rebalance policy was launched. He also argued that "the key for the military force structure of the future" was for the U.S. government to be able "to provide some predictability", however, given the situations with "the Budget Control Act" in place and "the lack of regular order", it was becoming difficult for the government to plan anything that was needed in the future (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 14 April, Issue: Vol. 161, No. 53).

Obama administration also aimed towards expanding its relations with its allies and partners and other powers, especially, China, in the region to counter nuclear proliferation. Lt. Gen. Frank G. Klotz, USAF (Ret.), Under Secretary for Nuclear Security, U.S. Department of Energy, testified before the Joint Subcommittee, Subcommittee on Asian and the Pacific & Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade, House Committee on Foreign Affairs on 16 July 2015 on the topic "United States-China Agreement for Peaceful Nuclear Cooperation". He was in support of the successor U.S.-China Agreement for Peaceful Nuclear Cooperation, or the alleged termed "123 Agreement", during the hearing titled, "Reviewing the U.S.-China Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement". This new agreement became the successor 123 Agreement that provided "a comprehensive framework for peaceful nuclear cooperation with China based

on a mutual commitment to nuclear nonproliferation” as improved from the previous 123 Agreement with China which was in place since 1985. This successor agreement was submitted by President Barack Obama to the Congress for review on 21 April 2015 (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 16 July, Serial No. 114–74).

This document was submitted by the administration along with the necessary unclassified Nuclear Proliferation Assessment Statement (NPAS) in addition to two accompanying classified annexes. The new 123 agreement was expected to enhance America’s “ability to manage and mitigate the risk of China diverting sensitive nuclear technology to its military programs or re-exporting it without U.S. permission”. Frank G. Klotz argued that the 123 agreement was a critical mechanism that the United States would use to influence “China’s nonproliferation behavior, and the insight and transparency into China’s nuclear programs”, which has lasted for more than thirty years as the U.S. and China has continued to cooperate in the area of nuclear proliferation (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 16 July, Serial No. 114–74).

Admiral Harry B. Harris, Jr., U.S. Navy Commander, U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM) testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) on “Maritime Security Strategy in the Asia-Pacific Region” on 17 September 2015. He reaffirmed that “the United States is a maritime nation” with “\$1.2 trillion in ship-born trade bound” for it annually. And he reminded the committee that “part of PACOM’s role in the Asia-Pacific Maritime Strategy will be ensuring all nations have continued access to the maritime spaces vital to the global economy”. Admiral Harry B. Harris, Jr., underscored that it was in the interest of the United States “to safeguard the freedom of the seas”, and the USPACOM in a routine basis carried out exercises with allies and partners in the region and helped in executing Freedom of Navigation operations while maintaining “a robust presence throughout the region”. He said that such activities helped in building “partner capacity to contribute to the region’s security, enhance relationships, improve understanding of shared challenges, and message the U.S.’s resolve”. He also stated that the Obama administration’s rebalance policy “strengthened treaty alliances and partnerships, increased partner capacity and cooperation, improved interoperability, and increased security capabilities in the region”. And that the Department of Defense’s “new maritime strategy” capitalized on “the

momentum of the rebalance” and kept on moving forward with its initiatives (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 17 September, S. HRG. 114-214).

David Shear, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian-Pacific Security Affairs, gave his testimony at the SASC hearing on Department of Defense “Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy” on 17 September 2015. He stated that in the last few years, the nations in the Asia-Pacific region had gone through military modernization and the resulting increase in the potential for miscalculated events and conflicts. These nations had also “significantly increased their surface, subsurface, and air capabilities, leading to a dramatic increase in the number of military planes and vessels operating in close proximity in the maritime domain” as tensions and territorial conflicts had seen an upsurge. In light of this, he explained that the need had become imperative for the nations in the region “to adhere to shared maritime rules of the road, such as the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES)”. As the tensions in the disputed waters increased, China reclaimed “more than 2,900 acres, amounting to 17 times more land in 20 months than the other claimants combined over the past 40 years, and accounting for approximately 95 percent of all reclaimed land in the Spratly Islands” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 17 September, S. HRG. 114-214).

David Shear also pointed out that America’s strategy towards the region was “focused on three fundamental goals: safeguarding the freedom of the seas; deterring conflict and coercion; and promoting adherence to international law and standards”. He continued to state that under the rebalance policy of the Obama administration, the U.S. continued to strengthen its military capacity to make sure that it successfully deterred “conflict and coercion and respond decisively when needed”. And therefore, the Department of Defense was involved in “investing in new cutting-edge capabilities, deploying our (America’s) finest maritime capabilities forward, and distributing these capabilities more widely across the region”. He went on to stress that the U.S. was enhancing its force posture in the region especially in the areas of air and maritime assets to safeguard Washington’s goals and interests, for instance the USPACOM maintained a “robust shaping presence in and around the South China Sea”, enabled by “activities ranging from training and exercises with allies

and partners to port calls to Freedom of Navigation Operations and other routine operations”. Washington also put much “emphasis on operational flexibility and maximizing the value of U.S. assets despite the tyranny of distance” in defense operations in the region (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 17 September, S. HRG. 114-214).

Even as the Obama administration gave importance to bilateral ties, the cornerstone of America’s forward presence, according to David Shear, remained to be the U.S. forces presence in Japan, and the administration worked on developing “a new laydown for the U.S. Marine Corps in the Pacific” as it needed to sustain its presence in the region. Two of the important bilateral defense agreements supporting the American military presence in the region would be – the bilateral Force Posture Agreement (FPA) with Australia and the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) with the Philippines, as the U.S. continued to build “greater interoperability and developing more integrated operations” with its allies and partners. In South Asia, Washington invested in the Indian Navy to provide “aircraft carrier technology sharing and design” to support the rebalance policy (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 17 September, S. HRG. 114-214).

Shear said that the Department of Defense was interested in “pursuing a two-pronged approach” to achieve its national interests and objectives in the region – the first represented focusing on the U.S. bilateral relationship with China, while the second was “focused on region-wide risk reduction measures”. He also mentioned that the Obama administration was able to reinvigorate “efforts to expand bilateral risk reduction mechanisms with China, including the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement (MMCA) and the establishment of an historic Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Rules of Behavior for Safety of Air and Maritime Encounters in 2014”. And that the U.S. was also “working to strengthen regional security institutions and encourage the development of a transparent, integrated, and diversified effective regional security architecture”, even as ASEAN was becoming an more and more central to DoD as a partner, and the Department further on continued “to enhance its engagement in ASEAN-based institutions such as the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus)” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 17 September, S. HRG. 114-214).

W. Patrick Murphy, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, and Marie Richards, Deputy Coordinator, Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism, U.S. Department of State, both testified on the subject, “Countering Extremism and the Threat of ISIS in Southeast Asia”, before the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, House Foreign Affairs Committee on 13 April 2016. The Obama administration side underscored the crucial role played by expanding regional coordination and cooperation between the U.S. and partner countries and allies in Southeast Asia in dealing with security and stability in the region as against rising tide of extremism and terrorism (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2016, 13 April, Serial No. 114–160).

W. Patrick Murphy and Marie Richards asserted that such cooperation in the region was improving, however, the administration officials claimed that Washington and the countries must continue to pursue cooperation among services such as immigration, border and security control agencies of the governments so that the efforts to counter deadly widespread attacks could be prevented and sustain such cooperative efforts for the stability and security of the region. They pointed out that such working partnerships that exist between the Department of State and USAID with other agencies like the National Counterterrorism Center, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Justice including the FBI’s Terrorist Screening Center, and the Department of Defense were providing strong support to the countries in the region and should sustain the efforts, as the region sought to address “the immediate security challenges and longer-term root causes of terrorism and violent extremism” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2016, 13 April, Serial No. 114–160).

Matthew J. Matthews, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State and Senior Official for APEC Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, gave his statement on the subject, “U.S. Policy in the Pacific: The Struggle to Maintain Influence”, before the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, House Foreign Affairs Committee on 23 June 2016. Matthews stated that in order to counteract the uncertainty of the rebalance policy in the Asia-Pacific region, the Obama administration should keep on ensuring that “the ‘Pacific’ piece of the rebalance to the Asia-Pacific “was not sidelined. The island-countries in the

Pacific depend on Washington for “leadership and support, including on combating climate change, enhancing maritime security” among many other issues (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2016, 23 June, Serial No. 114–176).

The United States and nine Pacific Islands – Palau, Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Cook Islands, Kiribati, Tonga, Nauru, Tuvalu, and Samoa – signed “shiprider” agreements in order to provide “a critical mechanism for combating IUU fishing and enhancing maritime law enforcement cooperation”. Various other agreements were also expanded between the U.S. and these islands in 2013 whereby three U.S. Navy (USN) ships were added to the U.S. Coast Guard vessels and aircraft to be included. Matthews mentioned that this development was seen as a step forward to provide further opportunities to increase cooperation in enforcement actions. He also said that since 2010, the U.S. Coast Guard assisted with 203 shiprider boardings in the region which resulted in “over \$4.5 million in seizures and fines”. He went on to insist that the Obama administration continued to work “closely with the Pacific island countries to reach a durable, effective climate change agreement”, especially during the December 2015 climate change summit in Paris and that many of the Island-countries were the first to both sign and join the agreement. The countries included Fiji, Nauru, Marshall Islands, Samoa, Palau and Tuvalu. He also testified that the U.S. increased “its support for climate change adaptation in the region” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2016, 23 June, Serial No. 114–176).

Expert Analysis of the Military Aspects of the Strategy

At the Hearing on “Rebalance to Asia II: Security and Defense; Cooperation and Challenges”, before the Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, US Senate, first session, on 25 April 2013, Janine Davidson, Senior Fellow, Center for a New American Security, Washington, DC, argued that the U.S. forward-postured and actively engaged U.S. military in the region was a “smart investment for the American people”. She pointed out that this policy was important as it prevented conflict, first of all. The first imperative of the American government was suggested to sustain America’s “core deterrence posture” and also to keep assuring America’s

“Northeast Asian allies against the existential threat posed by a nuclear-armed North Korea”. She argued that America’s role in the region was crucial as the reaffirmation of the security guarantee could “prevent a destabilizing arms race among nervous countries in the region” as tensions rose in the South China Sea or on the Korean Peninsula. She said that, in the second place, American forward-posture that was maintained and remained in the region was going to be a “more effective way to promote stability compared to projecting power”. And the third important point that Davidson stated was that “remaining forward” was “an efficient way to promote stability” by “positioning a larger percentage of a smaller force forward, especially in places like Japan or Korea”, allies that shared the burden and costs to construct and keep up America’s facilities (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2013, 25 April, S. HRG. 113-138).

In light of the growing provocation from North Korea, Janine Davidson said that the allies and partners of the U.S. in Southeast Asia started “enhancing their own militaries and learning to work together” with the U.S. so as “to promote security and stability across the rest of the region”. And she also insisted that America’s “presence, policy, and military posture” in the region must be able to adjust to the changing dynamics, which include “new modes of military-to-military engagement and new partnerships” that would “promote stability and burden-sharing throughout the region”. She highlighted the importance of exercises like the U.S.-hosted RIMPAC that represented militaries from over twenty countries and existed as the world’s largest multilateral maritime exercise which could be employed “to develop shared norms for maritime security”. Janine Davidson affirmed that the strategic approach used by the Obama administration regarding the military aspect of the rebalance policy in Asia was wise as they gave emphasis to “remaining operationally resilient vis-a-vis core threats in Northeast Asia, while also becoming more geographically distributed to address the changing dynamics in the southeast”. The administration’s moves in countries like Australia, Singapore, and elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific region reflected the above mentioned vision at the same time as America remained “respectful of the domestic political issues in these countries” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2013, 25 April, S. HRG. 113-138).

At the Hearing, “Rebalance to Asia II: Security and Defense; Cooperation and Challenges”, before the Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, First Session, on 25 April 2013, Michael J. Green, Senior Vice President for Asia and Japan Chair, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, clearly pointed out that the experts in the United States or in the Obama administration did not have “a clear consensus” on what was behind the disputes in the East and South China Seas. Among the many other arguments regarding the reason behind the disputes, he said that he believed “China's pursuit of what in the PLA has called the “Near Sea” doctrine, dominance over the waters near their coast” was a reasonable logic causing the disputes that any rising power would do. He also argued that the U.S. had not “always been consistent” in the way it expressed its interests and its commitments. He asserted that the U.S. did not “have a position on these territorial claims”, but he said that Washington needed “to be crystal clear and consistent” that it would “oppose efforts at coercion against partners and allies” in the region (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2013, 25 April, S. HRG. 113-138).

Green also pointed out that the U.S. needed to be more agile and smart with regards to how it conducts capacity building with partners given that there was limited resources. He also laid emphasis on the requirement build firm networks of alliances, for instance, trilateral partnerships like Japan-Korea-United States and Japan-United States-Australia were good examples. Another concern which he mentioned was the notion of dispersing American forces and that it was very logical as the U.S. is up against ballistic missile threats. A final concern was the security dynamic in the Asia and the Pacific region that had become even more complicated as threats were emerging in areas such as cyberspace, outer space, and nuclear matters. He also emphasized the crucial part that dialogues between the U.S. and countries of the region played in bringing about understanding and maintaining stability in the region (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2013, 25 April, S. HRG. 113-138).

Congress was, thus, convinced that the US pivot to Asia was a long term strategy that it was ready to commit resources. At the hearing on “United States Defense Policy Issues Pertaining to the Asia-Pacific Theater”, Kurt M. Campbell, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, The Asia Group, testified saying that the biggest concern of the Obama

administration in its engagement in the Asia-Pacific region was more than just the dysfunctionality of the American system, it was more of focusing on the Asia-Pacific theatre which needed much attention. He also said that the region enjoyed a bipartisan support, however, it needed more focus and commitment, and in that increasing military capability was critical. Campbell was followed by Green's testimony. Green said that on the brighter side, the allies and partners of the U.S. in the region supported Washington's strategy and American military power dwarfed any other military power in the region. But, on the darker side, China's military might was developing at a tremendous speed and despite the rebalance policy, China's military campaign in the South China Sea had increased. (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 14 April, Issue: Vol. 161, No. 53).

Green said that enhancing America's "deterrence capabilities" against all the rising capable challengers emanating from China and North Korea in the region was critical. And the U.S. must carry out advanced cooperation with vulnerable countries in the region to strengthen them, and employ an "all-of-government approach" back at home to tackle security and military situations abroad. Green also said that the U.S. welcomed Xi Jinping's "new modal of great power relations" which was a mistake but utilize other methods to increase cooperation with China to avoid conflicts. He also pointed out the Indian government was more willing to spend its military "in the great power game not only of the Indian Ocean, but also Southeast Asia and the South China Sea." Green went on to state that India had been "developing partnerships with Japan, for example, or with Australia" that were "very much on a pace" with what India was doing with the U.S. in terms of developing strategic partnership (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 14 April, Issue: Vol. 161, No. 53).

James L. Schoff, Senior Associate, Asia Program Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, testified on 15 July 2015 before the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, on the subject, "Strengthening U.S. Alliances in Northeast Asia". Schoff spoke on the ties the U.S. had with allies like Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK). These alliances that the U.S. government enjoyed were often referred to as "cornerstones" or "lynchpins" that America banks on in the Asia-Pacific region in pursuing its foreign and security policies objectives and they needed to be encouraged even more so.

He insisted that the U.S. should focus on long-term goals and try to fill the policy gaps as well, whenever they come up. He went on to thank the Congress for giving bipartisan support to alliances including the U.S.-Japan and U.S.-ROK ties which have been paid much attention by both the Bush and Obama administrations over the years (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 15 July, Serial No. 114–73).

Schoff, further, pointed out that bilateral defense cooperation with these key allies had broadened and further deepened in an evolving manner while the security environment in the region had deteriorated. In recent years, the frequency of “complex military exercises updated bilateral planning, collaborated in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) operations” had increased. For instance, the U.S.-ROK alliance has weathered numerous North Korean acts of belligerence and attempted intimidation in recent years and also the alliance had been expanding its relevance beyond the Korean Peninsula. He also asserted that the U.S. should “welcome Japan’s reinterpretation of the Constitution to allow it the limited exercise of collective self-defense, since collective self-defense might apply to UN-approved international security cooperation activities and to a situation involving North Korea”. Also the expanding relationship between Japan and Australia was increasingly becoming a vital aspect in the security scenario of the region as both the countries had started to cooperate and deepen their strategic and defense ties beyond their alliances with Washington (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 15 July, Serial No. 114–73).

Sharon Squassoni, Director and Senior Fellow, Proliferation Prevention Program Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) made a statement before the Joint Subcommittee, Subcommittee on Asian and the Pacific & Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade, U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs on 16 July 2015 on the subject, “Nuclear Cooperation with China: Strong Rules Build Strong Partners”. Squassoni observed that the unclassified Nuclear Proliferation Assessment Statement which had accompanied the new 123 agreement between the U.S. and China expressed that China a country had “come a long way in improving its nonproliferation credentials” but it could do more to uphold nuclear non-proliferation efforts. The document didn’t exactly

describe China “a nonproliferation partner”, but it stated China’s role as important in “U.S. efforts to denuclearize the Korean peninsula”. Squassoni said that the issue was that Beijing was weak in implementing controls on national export which was a matter of concern and probably also why China’s membership in the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) had not been concluded. He also asserted that China’s lack of transparency had been a challenge to the U.S. when it came to cooperation in the nuclear front (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 16 July, Serial No. 114–74).

Patrick M. Cronin, Senior Advisor and Senior Director, Asia-Pacific Security Program Center for a New American Security, testified on “America’s Security Role in the South China Sea” before the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, House Committee on Foreign Affairs on 23 July 2015. Cronin was of the opinion that over the recent years, the U.S. had entered “a period of intensified competition in the South China Sea” with rising China. He predicted a future “in the messy middle ground between war and peace” as China became more and more difficult to deal with. South China Sea’s relevance is tremendous. Patrick M. Cronin stated, “All maritime powers depend on it because through its waters sail half of the world’s commercial shipping by tonnage (valued at more than \$5.3 trillion).” He said that Beijing’s ambitions in the South China Sea were “backed by an impressive array of military and non-military actions designed to exert greater control over its neighborhood”, and that the U.S. must be prepared for a common response to eventuality like a potential declaration of an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the South China Sea as China did in the East China Sea. He insisted that the Obama administration should remain strong and prepared in the South China Sea region and build maritime domain awareness along with establishment of “national and multinational defensive and deterrent capacity for supporting assured access throughout the South China Sea” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 23 July, Serial No. 114 – 77).

On 3 February 2016, Green, Senior Vice President for Asia and Japan Chair, CSIS, Chair in Modern and Contemporary Japanese Politics and Foreign Policy, Georgetown University, and Lt. Gen. Thomas L. Conant (USMC,Ret.), the then Deputy Commander, United States Pacific Command gave a joint-testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee on the subject “An Independent Perspective of U.S. Defense Policy in the Asia-

Pacific Region”. The initiatives outlined below were focused on the defense portion of the rebalance, as directed by Section 1059 of the 2015 National Defense Authorization Act. The finding brought out some crucial findings (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2016, 3 February, Issue: Vol. 162, No. 20).

The first and foremost finding saw that the Obama administration was not able to present “a clear, coherent, or consistent rebalance strategy”, especially on the issue of how to manage China’s rise. The second dealt with defense budget cuts. The finding said that due to the cuts, the U.S. Defense Department’s “ability to the implement critical rebalance initiatives” were limited. And the third finding had to do with “the threat from so-called anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) threats” that seemed to have threatened America’s strategic interest and freedom in the region as some states were perceived to be seeking ways “to deny the United States the ability to project power in Asia”. Lastly, it was confirmed that Beijing’s “tolerance for risk” had gone beyond most expectations. The number of events when China had exerted its power through coercive actions against neighboring states had exceeded expectations in general, and these actions included “the creation of artificial features in disputed waters of the South China Sea”. The experts in the hearing underscored that all these trends suggested that the U.S. rebalance needed to be enhanced in order to protect American strategic and security objectives in the region. Both Green and Conant made some recommendations. They said that it was important for the Obama administration to “align Asia strategy within the U.S. government and with allies and partners” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2016, 3 February, Issue: Vol. 162, No. 20).

The rebalance policy had “no central U.S. government document” that described “the rebalance strategy and its associated elements”. In the second place, they also asserted that the U. S. should “strengthen ally and partner capability, capacity, resilience, and interoperability”. It was stated that allies and partners had become more concerned about the security challenges in the region as these countries’ capabilities were being outpaced more and more, therefore, the need for the U.S. to maintain a robust network of allies and partners across the region. The third recommendation was that the United States should “sustain and expand its regional military presence” in the region as “sustainability of U.S.

military presence throughout the region” were being questioned at home and abroad. Green and Conant also reminded that the American “forward-stationed U.S. forces” presented “one of the most important ways to signal U.S. political commitment to the region”. Fourth recommendation was concerned with the United States efforts to “accelerate development of innovative capabilities and concepts” to counter the rise of new threats and challenges in the region (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2016, 3 February, Issue: Vol. 162, No. 20).

Victor D. Cha, Senior Adviser and Korea Chair, Center for Strategic and International Studies and Fellow in Human Freedom, George W. Bush Institute, gave a testimony before the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs on 14 September 2016 on the subject, “North Korea’s Perpetual Provocations: Another Dangerous, Escalatory Nuclear Test”. He was of the opinion that North Korea's fifth nuclear test, which was held in September 2016, was part of the “pattern of aggressive WMD provocations” in the recent times. According to CSIS beyond Parallel Original Datasets, the nuclear detonation and ballistic missile launches that were conducted the week before the nuclear test tallied 62 provocations in the recent times since President Obama came to office. He went on to argue that by any metric those actions represented “a heightened tempo of activity”. He also clarified that North Korea became “the darkest stain on the Obama presidency’s pivot to Asia”. He also stated that the North sought “a peace treaty not so much to end the Korean War, but to codify U.S. recognition of it as a bona fide nuclear weapons state” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2016, 14 September, Serial No. 114-230).

Allies and Partners: Achievements

During the Obama administration period, the United States became more engaged in the Asia-Pacific region as rebalance policy was launched by the Obama administration towards the region. And this led to investment of more capable resources and political capital to renew allies and construct partnerships and fulfil precise missions in the region as a whole which was not just in the Northeast Asia where the U.S. has had long-established presence, but also in Southeast and South Asia.

The countries in the Asia-Pacific region who are treaty allies to the United States are Australia, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and Thailand while US partners in the region are India, Taiwan, Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia. Countries like Myanmar, Nepal, Laos, Cambodia, New Zealand, Bangladesh, Brunei and few other smaller countries have important parts to play in the regional security and stability. America's use of 'hub and spokes' method (the United States as the hub, the spokes as the bilateral alliances and the multilateral institutions along the margins of the U.S. policy) in approaching the regional strategic framework was untenable. Instead, under the rebalance policy, Washington aimed to enhance engagement with allies and partners in the region, and adapt to the already existing regional security framework in the Asia and Pacific region so as to take part in shaping the bilateral and multilateral trends in the region. The Asians already had existing rules for engagement in the regional bilateral and multilateral institutions which also applied to external parties such as the US who wanted to be a party to these institutions (Feigenbaum and Manning 2009). The Obama administration projected the U.S. as the powerful country which was willing to protect and assist its partners and allies in the Asia-Pacific region.

Senior director for Asian affairs on the National Security Council, Evan Medeiros, at a press conference in Kuala Lumpur on 27 April 2014 stated:

“...our alliance commitments, our security partnerships are tied to the security challenges and the threats our allies and partners face...whether it's Japan or South Korea. As the North Korean nuclear and missile threat has evolved; then our alliances have evolved” (Rhodes and Evan 2014).

On China, he continued saying:

“...we want a constructive relationship with China. We have made a serious effort at improving our military-to-military ties...we want all the countries in the region to have a constructive relationship with China” (Rhodes and Evan 2014).

While on South China Sea, he articulated the statement:

“We oppose the use of intimidation, coercion or aggression by any state -- any state -- to advance their maritime territorial claims. And to the extent that our work with our alliance partners and our security partners helps them become more capable and not being vulnerable to intimidation, coercion or aggression” (Rhodes and Evan 2014).

The National Security Strategy 2015 (NSS 2015) document released on 6 February 2015 stated that the United States had been and would continue to be a Pacific power. It clearly gave importance and priority to the rebalance policy of the Obama administration to the Asia and Pacific region as compared to other regions of the world. The document stressed on the need to enhance stability and security in Asia by diversifying America’s security relationships and defence posture as well as presence in the region. It also highlighted the partnerships that the U.S. deemed important and to deepen them in Southeast Asia with countries such as Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia. The NSS 2015 also reiterated to uphold America’s treaty obligations to Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and Thailand. It also said that the United States would support “the rise of a stable, peaceful, and prosperous China”, and cooperate to avoid conflict in the region while upholding international and regional rules and obligations. The U.S. government reaffirmed its commitment to strengthen its strategic partnership with India. It also stated that Washington would continue its efforts with both India and Pakistan “to promote strategic stability, combat terrorism, and advance regional economic integration in South and Central Asia” (The White House 2015, February).

Chapter 5

Economic Aspects of the Rebalance Strategy

Introduction

The Asia-Pacific region's economic growth has changed the dynamics of international politics in the 21st century. The rising economic powers of the Asia-Pacific region emerged stronger from the 2007-2008 global economic recession and went on to experience rapid economic growth thereafter as a key engine for the global financial system amidst the existence of international economic improbability (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2010, 21 January, S. HRG. 111-708). The chapter will look into the executive approach, congressional inputs and domestic debates of the economic aspects of the strategy. It also discusses the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) in a detailed manner. Furthermore, the chapter analyzes the U.S.-China Economic relations and other important free trade agreements that came under the purview of the rebalance policy.

On the whole, this caused a tangible shift in economic power from the western world to the rising economies of Asia. The region has become one of the most attention-grabbing phenomena of the present century wherein the region hosts the fastest developing markets – the emerging economies of East, South, and Southeast Asia – with the largest middle class populace in the world. The rebalance policy of the Obama administration towards the Asia-Pacific region showed the administration's recognition and interest for economic engagement in the region to ensure free flow of market goods, investments, capital, transparency and fair trade in the region and ultimately, between the U.S. and the region. Washington realised early on that the capability to invest in the development of the economies of the region, the opportunity to sell goods and services to these countries' growing middle classes – would certainly power American economic growth for decades to come (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2010, 3 March, Serial No. 111–115). Thus, this was aimed at improving domestic economic wellbeing in the U.S. and American strategic interest in the region, at large.

In addition, as China's economic growth gained fresh power and influence in the region, America's attention in the region was heightened. The destinies of both the U.S. and China are interconnected, most importantly, by their economic realities. China possesses the capacity of being the only power that is capable of becoming a close economic competitor of the United States. American foreign policy experts however, pointed out that a strategy that leaves a vacuum in the Asia-Pacific theatre that allows the possibility of China filling the vacuum would harm the U.S. economy; and so, cooperation with China is a better and cautious course of action for the U.S. in the long run (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2010, 23 June, S. HRG. 111-764).

Paul Kennedy in his book, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers (1987)*, had warned that even if the United States had accumulated unparalleled war-making potent, its economic headship which made a vital base for its military supremacy, was being slowly worn out. The book talks about three other "power units" such as China, Japan and the European Community were achieving rapid economic strength in a relative manner, and all three posed challenges for America's unipolar supremacy (Kennedy 1987). He acknowledged that China, as an important rising power in Asia, set its priorities accurately. In fact, China's rapidly growing economic power exceeded even Kennedy's expectations. At present, China occupies the position of being the second-largest economy in the world, and the country is also positioned to be the world's largest exporter of merchandise (Kennedy 1987).

Like any other powerful country, China has voracious demand for resources which is influencing its foreign policy in the Pacific, Africa and West Asia. China also has vast U.S. dollars in reserve which is essentially needed to use or potentially lose as the dollar as it wears away in value. The Obama administration saw China as racing towards the goal of converting its economic clout into greater military supremacy. Kennedy was able to identify that the American decline would be mainly financial, among other few important areas ? how 87 prediction came true in obama time?

Thers ponted out that despite Asia's economic growth and changing power relations, the existing western order, durable and expansive in nature, led by the U.S. is difficult to

topple but easier to join. This order also led to the foundation of universal financial structures/institutions that unified democracies and market-oriented societies together by availing universal membership to nations (both great and new) such as International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, etc. They have lasted and produced positive returns. An important feature of this phenomenon is that the stakeholders of the established western order have formed coalition and supported American leadership, making it a legitimate power in the international order. In this global system, rising states and their ambitions are an important observable fact in which these states aim to reform the international rules and global or regional institutions to serve their own interests (Ikenberry 2008).

It is a fact that even if the U.S. remains the strongest country, its power and status quo has been challenged and eroded by the rising economies as they continue to grow – China, India, Japan, Russia and other rising states. China has become an even more formidable global power mainly, because its economy is expected to grow twice over in the following decade. Analysts argue that China's economic growth has been an extraordinary journey that has contributed to the transformation of the East Asian region, and China is expected to grow rapidly in the coming years in power and influence in the region and world. further, China's rise does not need to witness a difficult hegemonic transition. If there is going to be a U.S.-Chinese power transition in this 21st century multipolar world order, it will be unlike those of the past system transitions, as China is confronted by an international order that is diverse in nature from the systems that rising states were confronted with in the past (Ikenberry 2008).

As China's power grows, it is confronted with the realities of the international western order. Chinese leaders, who understand the nature of globalization, with the global economic revolution and its technology, amended its techniques to tackle global and regional politics for China to build and acquire dependable and affluent allies around the globe. The western order dominated by the United States support a China with strong economic growth and China has been given complete access to the western regional and international organizations within the existing order. The most significant feature of the

existing western order is its extraordinary capability to accommodate rising powers. Rising powers in the Asia and Pacific region such as China, India, Japan, South Korea, Russia, Indonesia and the other minor countries have been given the opportunity to be part of the western order and thrive in and through it. The U.S. grand strategy of rebalance was to be given the motto "The road to the East runs through the West." The U.S.-dominated western system presents rules and institutions that benefit all states including weak and strong, rising and falling, emerging and mature, the system also generates economic growth and power while exerting restraint (Ikenberry 2008).

It became of utmost importance for the United States to put in effort to integrate rising powers into important international institutions (financial and others). As China continues on this path of growth and integrating itself in the system, it would continue to rise while making critical strategic choices. Finally, the baton lies with the Western order that requires to be strengthened, and the rules and institutions need to be maintained to thrive on. Ikenberry suggested that the U.S. must put in place institutions and strengthen statutes that would safeguard its interests regardless of any power transition or global power distribution in the coming ten, fifty, or even hundred years (Ikenberry 2008).

Mapping the Global Future: Report of the National Intelligence Council's 2020 Project, which was published in 2004 by the office of the Director of the National Intelligence of the National Intelligence Council of the United States of America, provided a futuristic view of America's foreign policy in the following 15 years calculated that the U.S. would continue to dominate the world order. The report also analyzed that most of the important powers had forgotten the idea of balancing the U.S. It went on to explain the tectonic shift in global politics in the post- Cold War period and the ramifications of the changes from the historic events which were continually unraveled. One of the examples was the emergence of rising powers in Asia, among other events in the world (National Intelligence Council 2004).

The *National Intelligence Council's 2020 Project* report forecasted that even if the challenges ahead were going to be overwhelming, the U.S. would continue to hold on to massive advantages. This would allow the United States to play a pivotal role covering a

broad range of concerns including economic issues in which no other power would match by the year 2020. At the same time, countries such as Japan and South Korea in the Asia-Pacific region have always been seen as Washington's reliable friends, and the relationships between the U.S. and its allies in this region would be even more deeply affected and influenced by China's rise, mainly, China's economic growth, and the way in which opportunities and challenges unfolded in the region (National Intelligence Council 2004).

A later report, *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World* of 2008, published by National Intelligence Council, the depiction was a world in which the United States continued to have a major role in global politics as a world power, however its status and power were reduced to one amongst many other rising economic powers and global actors that controlled concerns and challenges. Both reports showed apparent rapid international economic growth led by the rising powers including China, India and Russia (National Intelligence Council 2008). This clearly reflected the change in America's view of world politics as compared to the 2020 project report. The report noted:

“...the transformation is being fueled by a globalizing economy, marked by an historic shift of relative wealth and economic power from West to East, and by the increasing weight of new players— especially China and India. The US will remain the single most important actor but will be less dominant” (National Intelligence Council 2008).

Rong Chen, in his article “A Critical Analysis of the U.S. ‘Pivot’ toward the Asia-Pacific: How Realistic is Neo-Realism?”, also argued that if China is striving ahead to acquire more resources for growth in areas including economic and others fields, it would by design use its power to enlarge its sphere of influence as the rising country highly depends on importing raw materials and since, its economy is driven mostly by its exports growth. Therefore, China would do almost anything to secure the routes to get access to resources and markets for the country's growth in this great power struggle in the Asia-Pacific, even if it means challenging the United States (Chen 2013).

Russia, of late, shifted its focus of exporting energy towards the East Asian markets with China, particularly, in its strategic framework. However, Russia understands that trading in energy with East Asia would be an uncertain endeavour as the supply-and-demand trends in the market of the region are indecisive. Apart from energy export, Russia's arms exports swelled up (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute 2017).

The weaponry market is a new venture which has been providing an advantage to Russia's export growth; also this development has been enabling Russia to change the dynamics of cooperation with other states.

“Since 1950 the USA and Russia (or the Soviet Union before 1992) have consistently been by far the largest suppliers... At the regional level, the flow of arms to the Middle East grew by 86 per cent between 2007–11 and 2012–16, while the flow of arms to Asia and Oceania rose by 7.7 per cent... Despite sanctions, Russia's arms industry also grew its arms sales in 2015, mostly due to domestic sales and some exports, while emerging and established producers show mixed results” (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute 2017).

To further the trade growth, alongside Obama's rebalancing efforts, initiatives such as the Eurasian Economic Union was observed to be useful in linking Chinese market and the European market. With the economic downturn in the European market, Russia found it less risky to turn their attention towards East Asia as an added market for exporting oil and gas (Bond 2017).

Despite its notorious behaviour with nuclear tests and several weapons blasts recently, North Korea has persisted to push its efforts towards building up its economic cooperation with China. At the same time, the country was also observed to be showing signs of ramping up diplomatic relations with the Southeast Asian states so as to gain guidance on economic growth and receive attracting investments (*The New York Times* 2016).

The United States and China working together towards stabilizing the global economy, global ecosystem and global security became a more pragmatic option for the U.S. (Lampton 2009).

The Obama administration gave importance to the Pacific nations in the TPP agreement including countries such as Australia, Brunei, Chile, Canada, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, Vietnam, and more so to Japan to strive together and deepen economic ties with the U.S., and also balance off China's over gaining of economic power and influence in the Asia and Pacific region (Office of the United States Trade Representative 2015).

Executive Approach to Economic Aspects of Pivot Strategy

As America realized the need to increase its economic engagement and launched the rebalance policy, President Barack Obama at APEC CEO Business Summit Q&A on 12 November 2011 in Honolulu, Hawaii stated:

“And if we can stay on that trajectory, letting this region of the world know that America is a Pacific power and we intend to be here, actively engaged in trying to boost the economy worldwide and for our respective countries... The United States is a Pacific power and we are here to stay... there's no region in the world that we consider more vital than the Asia Pacific region, and we want, on a whole range of issues, to be working with our partner countries around the Pacific Rim in order to enhance job growth, economic growth, prosperity and security for all of us” (Obama 2011, 12 November).

Following the global financial crises of 2007-08, Asia emerged “as a key engine of global growth”. Stretching over several years, “the Asia-Pacific region has contributed two thirds of global growth, and now accounts for about 44 percent of global GDP”. The Asia-Pacific region also represented 56 percent of total U.S. trade, and contained the world's most dynamic trade and energy routes such as the Suez Canal, the Strait of Malacca, Strait of Hormuz, Bab el Mandeb and Mozambique Channel passing through the Indian Ocean. This region contains half of the world's total population and some of the world's major militaries, at present. The Obama administration realized the need to increase economic engagement in the Asia-Pacific region early on, and statements, declarations and arguments made by key officials, experts and scholars showed the evolving nature of economic engagement between the U.S. and the region (International Monetary Fund 2017).

Then Assistant Secretary Kurt M. Campbell testified before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment on 3 March 2010 stating that the closeness between Asia-Pacific countries and the United States was most evident in the economic relations. The Obama administration realized the importance of the region and therefore, elevated the economic side of the rebalance strategy to a point where the success of the strategic policy became dependent on the achievements of the economic element of the policy. “Free trade and robust economic engagement will remain a critical pillar for our strategic engagement in the Asia-Pacific region (Campbell 2010).”

Kurt M. Campbell also highlighted that Asian economies such as China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Taiwan and India were among America’s top-twelve trading partners. While ASEAN remained a significant trading partner which represented America’s fourth largest export market, he stated:

“Strong Asian participation in APEC, the WTO, and the G-20 reflects the increasing importance of Asian economies and their centrality to strengthening the multilateral trading system and sustaining our economic recovery” (Campbell 2010).

John Andersen, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Global Markets, International Trade Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce, before the Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, on the subject “Rebalance to Asia IV: U.S. Economic Engagement in East Asia and the Pacific” on 18 December 2013, went to testify that the East Asia and Pacific (EAP) region had become a vital economic hub for the world and America’s economic interests in particular (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2013, 18 December, S. HRG. 113–182).

Jason Foley, then Deputy Assistant Administrator, Bureau for Asia, United States Agency for International Development, testified before the Subcommittee on East Asia, the Pacific and International Cybersecurity Policy, Senate Foreign Relations Committee,

on the subject “Strategic Implications of Trade Promotion and Capacity-Building in the Asia-Pacific Region” on 16 June 2015 (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 16 June, Issue: Vol. 161, No. 96).

Jason Foley stated that while the middle class population in Asia was increasing along with rapidly growing trade opportunities by bringing out millions of people from extreme poverty, the region still was faced with “complex developmental challenges” that would threaten the economic growth trajectory. And as the economic prosperity of Asia is “inextricably tied” to the security, interest and prosperity of America, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) took up the fundamental role to accomplish that vision. USAID had done so in promoting quality economic growth by working towards advancing resilient and democratic societies and putting a stop to extreme poverty. This work has been done by the USAID through the APEC, ASEAN and the Lower Mekong Initiative on the regional level, and through bilateral means as well to achieve the developmental goals. In these countries, the U.S. put in efforts to build and help sustain good governance to promote economic growth which is inclusive and sustainable, while ensuring there are enough social and environmental safeguards (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 16 June, Issue: Vol. 161, No. 96). For instance,

“A hallmark of USAID’s regional work is our five-year ASEAN Connectivity through Trade and Investment (ACTI) project, which helps to improve ASEAN’s regulatory framework for trade and investment and private sector competitiveness — further opening markets for U.S. exports...We are also supporting APEC members in meeting their commitments by providing technical assistance in a number of U.S. priority areas through the five-year U.S.-APEC Technical Assistance to Advance Regional Integration (U.S.-ATAARI) project. Through APEC, we are working to advance regional economic integration, harmonize product standards, improve domestic regulations, and reduce or eliminate behind-the-border barriers to cross-border trade in 21 member countries...Together with the Department of State, USAID is currently hosting the Lower Mekong Initiative Renewable and Clean Energy Business Dialogue in Manila on the margins of the Asia Clean Energy Forum” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 16 June, Issue: Vol. 161, No. 96).

Gloria Steele, Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator, Bureau for Asia, United States Agency for International Development, testified before the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, on the subject, *U.S. Policy in the Pacific: The Struggle to Maintain Influence*, on 23 June 2016. She made the observation that the investments made by the USAID in the Pacific islands region were “a critical part of the United States’ vision for a peaceful, prosperous and stable Asia-Pacific”. She also affirmed that development played an “indispensable role alongside defense and diplomacy” in achieving America’s strategic interests in the region, which would start “by addressing the root causes of poverty, conflict and instability” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2016, 23 June, Serial No. 114–176).

Assistant Secretary Tom Malinowski, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, testified before the Subcommittee on East Asia, the Pacific, and International Cybersecurity Policy, of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, on “Strategic Implications of Trade Promotion and Capacity-Building in the Asia-Pacific Region” on 16 June 2015. Malinowski emphasized TPP’s importance and went on to argue that even if TPP failed, trade would still exist in the region between countries connected by trade agreements, he stated:

“...there would be far less political cooperation between nations in shaping the rules governing this growing commerce, including rules that protect labor rights and the environment. And to the extent rules and values might still develop, countries other than the United States would be shaping them. The fact is that the high standards we seek will only happen if we are there to insist on them. By binding its parties’ economic futures together, the TPP also can deepen cooperation across the region on other matters of importance to the United States” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 16 June, Issue: Vol. 161, No. 96).

Tom Malinowski further highlighted that amongst the potential strategic benefits that TPP was going to give, advancement of human rights and labor rights were included. He said that promotion of human rights, as one of the objectives of the U.S. foreign policy, was one of the central goals of the rebalance policy to the Asia-Pacific region. This framework would help Washington, if put in place, attain its economic objectives by enforcing the rule of law and support institutions that would fight corruption, protect

property rights, put into effect contracts and also guarantee free flow of information and data (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 16 June, Issue: Vol. 161, No. 96).

In his testimony in the same hearing as above, Kurt Tong, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs, U.S. Department of State, stated that the Trans-Pacific Partnership was “an urgent and vital initiative” of the Obama administration. He testified about the role TPP was supposed to play, which was, “the center piece of our Asia-Pacific economic ‘rebalance’ strategy”, but he went on to affirm that the U.S. also had other means at its disposal (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 16 June, Issue: Vol. 161, No. 96).

Congressional Inputs to the Economic Aspects

Congress had become more and more dysfunctional as a result of political polarisation in both the houses. Members did not protect the rebalance policy enough against the most negative effects of congressional dysfunction. During the Obama administration, even if the policy enjoyed a bipartisan support, this neglect widened the scope for individual members of the Congress to support specific issues in relation to a single country or concern, without much regard or realization as to how it would fit into the larger regional strategy. In general, the American people recognized China’s growing economic threat but a comprehensive and clear economic agenda to deal with such threat was lacking even under the Obama administration. The economic aspect of the rebalance policy, embodied in the TPP, was vital for the policy to move forward, however, it got stuck in the Congress with all the technicalities (Connelly 2015).

On the other hand, Senator Jeff Sessions (Republican - Alabama) argued that around 5,554 pages-long multilateral trade agreement, TPP, would have a deteriorating consequence on American economy and also underscored the fact that bilateral trade agreements were in place already with important countries (Australia, Chile, Singapore, Mexico, Canada and Peru) which were part of TPP and much could be carried out through those trade agreements and pursue other bilateral agreements instead of joining TPP (Breitbart 2015). He stated:

“No American has the resources to ensure that his or her interests are being protected in this document. It’s so long and the ramifications are so broad that Congress cannot do its job to ensure that the people’s interests are safeguarded by such an agreement” (Breitbart 2015).

Following the debates mentioned above, Aaron L Connelly, Research Fellow, East Asia Program, Lowy Institute sums up by stating:

“Among policymakers in the Obama administration and in the foreign policy community of both parties in Washington, the TPP is seen as the linchpin of the rebalance strategy. On the Hill, however, it is seen very differently.... The leadership of both the Senate and House trade committees pushed for passage of the measure, and the measure eventually passed with support from Republicans and moderate Democrats. But the debate in Congress focused on issues such as tariffs, labour protections, and the perception that the TPP would be a handout to big business. Sophisticated arguments about TPP’s importance to the US position in Asia played little role in swaying the 28 Democrats in the House and 13 Democrats in the Senate who voted for the bill... tying negotiators’ hands and making trade agreements such as the TPP much more difficult to conclude” (Connelly 2015).

Moreover, on the ground, the United States Trade Representative reported to Congress that the Obama administration proposed to incorporate Japan, which was currently the world’s third largest economy, into the TPP negotiations. The whole process, nevertheless, was still in progress whereby the present members were yet to finalize their respective domestic procedures. Japan’s entry and China’s possible entry was going to make TPP stand out as the most reliable passageway to building and maintaining a larger regional economic integration in the Asia and Pacific region (Office of the United States Trade Representative 2013).

On 11 November 2016, according to a report by CNN, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell told reporters that the Senate was not in any position to “act on the sweeping trade deal with 12 Asia-Pacific nations in the lame-duck session of Congress”. While, at the same time, even if Paul Ryan, House of Representatives Speaker, supported TPP earlier, he affirmed in November 2016 that “the GOP does not have the votes to pass it in the House”. On 10 November 2016, Senator Chuck Schumer, Senate minority leader at present, informed labor leaders that “the deal would not be ratified.” Lawmakers on the

Capitol Hill were not ready to bring the trade deal forward during the lame duck session of Congress (Raju and Jones 2016).

The trade deal was being debated in the Congress and among various groups including labor groups, environmental groups, citizens group, where many complications erupted regarding environmental issues, imports food quality, job outsourcing from the U.S. leading to job losses in the U.S., labour issues, and other potential detrimental effects to the U.S. economy due to the trade agreement. The administration still had little hope to get TPP approved during the short “lame duck” session of Congress after the presidential election on 8 November 2016, however, opposition to the deal grew stronger even during the presidential campaign and nothing could be achieved. The trade deal was backed generally by U.S. business interests; however, it was opposed by 2016 presidential candidates Donald Trump (Republican), Hillary Clinton (Democrat – New York) and Bernie Sanders (Independent – Vt.) claiming that trade deals lead to American job losses and TPP was no different. Senators Elizabeth Warren (Democratic – Mass.) and Jeff Sessions were other major opponents of TPP while leaders such as Senate Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch (Republican – Utah) saw the various potential problems in the trade agreement even if he supported the deal in its formation phase (*Fortune* 2016). It was evident that TPP was dead already.

TPP, in general, had proponents in both Republican and Democrat circles; however, it turned out to be “a campaign symbol for lost manufacturing jobs, especially in the rust belt states”. Those who opposed the deal, counting many unions, disagreed with the terms of the deal saying that “it did not protect against countries that manipulate their currency and foreign companies suing, in special tribunals, for exemptions to various US rules” (*The Guardian* 2016).

Also, the Congress and several groups such as Global Trade Watch taking part in important decision making circle claimed that they had been kept in the dark when it came to the text of the TPP agreements. And some claimed that the text and agreement could become a tyrant in deciding the rules of engagement in international trade. Thus, Obama administration reeled under this pressure from various sides. The TPP had

obviously become the economic arm of Obama's rebalancing policy, roping strategic economies into a lawfully obligatory corporate-governance system. Thus, President Obama's tenure in office got over and the agreement could not go through the Congress and President Donald Trump kept his campaign promise by pulling out from the trade deal.

Domestic Debates on the Economic Aspects of Pivot Strategy

For 'rebalance' to achieve what it wanted, economic diplomacy was given the amount of attention it required to stand as one of the vital structures of the grand strategy. If the Obama administration had to attempt to achieve greater economic engagement with the region, it had to prevail in building a number of networks of economic bilateral agreements with both allies and partners (old and new ones) so that liberal trade access to American markets was made possible, coupled with increase in developmental assistance. Several regional organizations in the Asia-Pacific region carryout unique functions such as ASEAN +3 (includes China, Japan and Korea) was recommended to be the core body for financial co-operation in East Asia and the APEC was expected to go on functioning as the centre for countries to address issues of trans-economic cooperation (Caballero-Anthony 2008).

Carla A. Hills, then U.S. Trade Representative Chair and CEO of Hills & Company, International Consultants, testified at the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on 23 June 2010 stating that America must expand its trade and investment ties in Asia as the region offered the U.S. "a significant opportunity to stimulate domestic economic growth and job creation" (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2010, 23 June, S. HRG. 111–764).

Carla A. Hills went on to say that the Asia-Pacific region hosted 21 members of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC) which represented:

“...approximately 2.5 billion consumers, 58 percent of global trade, and more than half of world output. Over the past decade most of the increase in global growth has been generated by the APEC economies. Collectively these economies account for a majority of our nation's exports. Further opening these markets to

U.S. entrepreneurs would enhance our nation's competitiveness in the world's most vibrant region where other major trading nations including China, Japan, South Korea, the European Union and the economies comprising the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have negotiated or are currently negotiating bilateral and plurilateral trade agreements that advantage their entrepreneurs over ours. Obtaining equal or better access to these markets would enhance our nation's competitiveness, create jobs, and boost growth. Achieving this will require leadership and action on our part. To strengthen our trade and investment ties in this high-growth region, we should move forward promptly to negotiate the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which could serve as a first step toward a broad market opening agreement in the region which over time could incorporate additional APEC members, such as Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, and eventually China...The APEC Summit in Hawaii in 2011 gives the United States an excellent opportunity to showcase a completed TPP, which would demonstrate its renewed commitment to the region" (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2010, 23 June, S. HRG. 111-764).

At the turn of the century, international strategic shifts allowed Asia to become an economically booming zone and have come to occupy the position of becoming United States' largest source of imports and second-largest export market following the North American region. Regardless of the grim image of the region with a range of latent conflicts and security challenges, East Asia has been witnessing a swiftly changing strategic environment, mostly due to the rise of China which is stimulated by China's striking economic growth. As Asia embarked on becoming a global economic hub with China as the leading country in generating its economic power; in this context, cooperation between the United States and the Asian countries especially China was recommended; and the notion of economic cooperation could powerfully underpin the case of structuring and bringing about resolution (s) to disputes over security issues through the different methods including negotiations and facilitating security cooperation by using possible methods (Feigenbaum 2011).

The importance of the region was also explained by prominent authors such as Evan A. Feigenbaum, senior fellow in the Asia Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, how the Obama administration continued to carry on the legacy of a long line of preceding U.S. governments' policies that tried to strengthen the strategic milieu by reinforcing stability and security in the Asia-Pacific region. This showed continued American interest in the region carried out through various strategies such as

intensifying Bush-era initiatives such as reinforcement of relations with existing allies in the region, negotiating the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and also through the construction of new partnerships with India, Indonesia and Vietnam (Feigenbaum 2011).

According to a CRS Report, the Obama administration could be observed pursuing economic and trade agreements with countries in the Asia-Pacific region. For instance, four out of ten rising export markets targeted in the 2011 National Export strategy, which were China, India, Indonesia and Vietnam, are nations within the Asia-Pacific region. The administration's decision to settle South Korea-U.S. FTA and even the TPP represented America's FTA policy in Asia. However, at the same time, tensions between the U.S. and China increased even more by the second term of the administration as President Obama and his team realised the difficulties posed by China's increasing aggressive behaviour and as trade negotiations became more complicated, thus, America also saw the need to contain the Chinese moves to pursue hegemonic influence in Asia while avoiding conflicts (CRS 2012).

On the subject, "U.S. Economic Engagement in East Asia and the Pacific", Matthew P. Goodman, the Simon Chair in Political Economy, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), testified that the economics side of the policy was at the center of Obama administration's rebalancing strategy and that the region hosted twenty one members of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) which made up around 55% of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) and 44% of global trade (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2013, 18 December, S. HRG. 113–182).

"Obama administration has put economics at the center of its Asia-Pacific strategy. But it has arguably raised the stakes by making the overall success of its rebalancing to Asia contingent on a successful economic strategy, in particular completion of a high standard Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement... I believe the administration's aim is to make a successful TPP the driver and de facto template for a new multilateral system of rules... Without TPP the rebalance would contain little of substance that is new and would be perceived in the region as driven primarily by military considerations" (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2013: 32 – 33, 18 December, S. HRG. 113–182).

For instance, as the Obama administration launched the TPP as part of the rebalance policy towards the region, China went on pursuing its own bilateral trade agreements with countries such as Australia (China's sixth largest trading partner) and South Korea. Another trade regional trade agreement was the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank which came into force on 25 December 2015. It is an agreement launched by China with the participation of 57 founding members which included Malaysia, Singapore and four TPP member countries. It was an agreement that the U.S. and Japan refused to go along with. Another trade initiative that China supported and started participating in talks was the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) which officially commenced in November 2012 at the ASEAN Summit in Cambodia. This initiative links the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) with six other countries including China, Japan, Australia, India, New Zealand and South Korea. It accounts for around 30% of global gross domestic product (Makinen 2015).

China also went on to launch yet another initiative – the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship of China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative created on 22 May 2013 to integrate the economies of Eurasia by means of belts and roads along with the help of other infrastructure initiatives. As a challenge to Washington's initiatives in the Asia-Pacific region, China established the OBOR as part of its grand strategy to achieve a peaceful rise as a great power at the regional and international level through economic schemes such as \$ 40 billion Silk Road Fund and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) to create "new growth engines along the New Silk Road with a win-win and cooperative approach". Washington's rebalance policy in Asia-Pacific involved "economic and strategic focus to the countries of South East Asia including India in shaping its rebalance of the region including South China Sea and the Indian Ocean", this caused a great level of uneasiness for China in respect to its economic pursuits in the region (Ali 2016).

Also, Lori Wallach, Director of Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch, protested around the signing of TPP. She argued:

“The TPP includes the kind of language that was in NAFTA that makes it easier for big corporations to offshore more American jobs... The TPP includes the new monopoly rights for big pharmaceutical companies that would raise medicine prices... The TPP would flood us with more imported unsafe food. For instance, it includes Malaysia and Vietnam... inspections could be challenged as an ‘illegal trade barrier’... Plus, the TPP would expand the outrageous investor-state system. Those are those tribunals where a foreign corporation can sue the U.S. government, going around our courts, going around our laws, and demand cash compensation from us taxpayers for any law they think violates their new TPP privileges and rights as a foreign investor... (And) a lot of the environmental groups that the administration had touted would support the TPP came out against it” (*Democracy Now* 2016).

The Obama administration had to struggle between pursuing trade cooperation with China and at the same time, containing Chinese economic ambitions and expanding economic clout in the region. However, Washington and Beijing had to find ways to cooperate and build trade relations. In doing so, both the countries invested in negotiations to try and hammer out a Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT). Unfortunately, during the Obama administration, this treaty could not be finalized as talks got bogged down in the middle of China’s attempt to protect and keep several sectors of its economy inaccessible to foreign investment. If China ever wanted to join the TPP, it had to approve the Bilateral Investment Treaty first (Makinen 2015).

As opposed to what the Obama administration and proponents of TPP claimed, Tufts University’s Global Development and Environment Institute Working Paper No. 16-01 titled, “Trading Down: Unemployment, Inequality and Other Risks of the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement” assessed TPP’s impact on the American economy stating that the trade deal would have:

“...negative effects on growth in the United States and in Japan. We also find increasing inequality and job losses in all participating economies. Overall, we project the loss of 770,000 jobs, with the largest losses occurring in the United States. Furthermore, we project negative effects on growth and employment in non-TPP countries. This increases the risk of global instability and a race to the bottom, in which labor incomes will be under increasing pressure” (Tufts University 2016).

And in January 2016, Peterson Institute for International Economics brought out their Working Paper 16-2 and estimated TPP's impact on U.S. economy stating:

...the TPP will substantially benefit its members, and in particular raise real incomes in the United States by \$131 billion in 2030 and a similar amount in subsequent years. To be sure, the TPP will also generate adjustment costs; some workers may face difficult transitions as less productive jobs are lost and more productive jobs are created. Policies to mitigate those effects are ethically compelling (Weisman 2016) and likely to be affordable (Peterson Institute for International Economics 2016).

On 6 June 2016, *Reuters* reported that as many as 450 groups across America asked Congress to refuse ratification of TPP if it came up for a vote in November. They have all argued that the trade deal was going to permit fossil fuel companies to challenge American environmental regulations in extrajudicial tribunals. Most of the groups were environmental organizations who cautioned that “companies could challenge U.S. environmental standards in tribunals outside the domestic legal system under provisions of the 12-nation TPP” (*Reuters* 2016).

Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP)

The Obama administration pushed towards completing a high-standard Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) deal, which became one of the most vital elements of the Obama administration's rebalance policy. This step to improve trade in the region was essentially an advancement of the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership (TPSEP) which included Brunei, Singapore, New Zealand and Chile. Washington had always envisioned constructing financial institutions or agreements in which it can have substantial influence to lay down the rules of free and fair trade to generate jobs at home and further its national interests abroad, and keep China out of them as far as possible. However, the U.S. still did not rule out bringing China into the TPP agreement. The negotiation for an FTA with the TPSEP member states was suggested by the United States in September 2008. Eventually, allies of the United States such as Australia, Vietnam, Malaysia and Peru joined in supporting the negotiation. All of these countries went into formal negotiations commencing in March 2010. As of January 2012, 10 rounds of negotiations

took place. TPP was the cornerstone of the Obama administration's economic policy in the Asia Pacific, an agreement that was committed to enhancing trade and investment amongst the partnering states in endorsing and promoting economic growth, innovation, development and sustaining generation of jobs (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2017).

As explained, the economic diplomatic card could forge stronger relations between the U.S. and the Asian countries. Its significance in the entire rebalance policy was revealed by events including the U.S. recognizing the Asian economic hub as a booming financial region that could not be ignored anymore; America's desire to cooperate and amalgamate its economy with Asia's rising economies and growing multilateral economic arrangements; the U.S.' involvement in the TPP along with other eleven countries; and, Washington's efforts to increase its foreign assistance by seven percent to the Asia-Pacific region. Indeed, the TTP started proving to be a forum where the U.S. would be able to play a chief leadership role in the region (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2013, 18 December, S. HRG. 113-182).

The Obama administration continued the political tradition like all the previous administration and put economics at the core of its Asia-Pacific approach. According to Matthew P. Goodman, the economic side of the rebalance strategy was motivated by three comprehensive objectives: support domestic growth for jobs and employment, maintain and bring up to date the rules of the international free trade system, and defend the U.S engagement and long-term presence in the Asia-Pacific region. The objectives set forward were observed as the two sides of the same coin in the context of the correlation between foreign policy and economics. For a country like the U.S. to be successful in retaining itself as the strongest power needed to use its political or diplomatic tools to maintain and achieve better economic results, such as growth in employment rate and provide more jobs; and at the same time, utilizing economic means in a strategic manner to sustain foreign policy goals, including reinforcing laws and rules, and thereby, increasing American presence in the Asia-Pacific region. "We want to create an open and transparent economic environment" (Department of Commerce 2014).

The intriguing part of the whole new advancement was that the TPP would intensify the investment and trade in the region; this region where the hefty and emergent markets already absorbed a large chunk of U.S. manufactured goods, agricultural products, services, etc. To substantiate the aforesaid statement, the exports from the U.S. to the Asia-Pacific region amounted up to \$942 billion in 2012, wherein U.S. exports of agricultural products represented a total of \$106 billion in 2012, the U.S. private services exports totalled \$226 billion in 2011, and the various enterprises in the U.S. exported \$247 billion to the region in 2011 (Office of the United States Trade Representative 2013).

From the Foreign Affairs Committee's Congressional Hearing on "America's Future in Asia: From Rebalancing to Managing Sovereignty Disputes" on 5 February 2014, it is evident that Washington's approach was trans-pacific rather than Asia-centric; and it emphasized on high standards of liberalization and rule-making. It also showed how America was contributing towards maintaining security stability and prosperity in the region, a region with which the U.S. has had huge dealings in trade and commerce (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2014, 5 February, Serial No. 113 – 123).

Officials in Washington concurred to this. For instance, Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker, during her visit to the ASEAN region, in 2014, elaborated on the:

“...economic dimension of this commitment, which includes deepening trade and investment ties with existing partners, building the soft and hard infrastructure necessary to support the growth of emerging partners” (Department of Commerce 2014).

For better growth momentum, however, a great deal of focus was given to strengthen and build up regional machineries in order to promote the prompt emergence of growing Asian economies, empowering them to cross the threshold, getting into the international investment and trade system which included the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the Association for Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (Department of Commerce 2014).

An important economy and ally, Japan, is the world's third largest economy and U.S. fourth largest trading partner. In 2012, it was recorded that the U.S. exported \$70 billion in goods to Japan. Japan started to formally take part on the negotiating tables of the TPP in 2013 during the 18th round of negotiations in Malaysia. TPP countries represented around 40% of global GDP and about one-third of the whole global trade. In the Subcommittee Hearing of the Foreign Affairs Committee on "America's Future in Asia: From Rebalancing to Managing Sovereignty Disputes" on 5 February 2014, Brad Sherman (Democrat - California) highlighted that the U.S. had an enormous trade deficit with Japan and that Japan had been depending on America for security and defense. He asked the questions if Japan had made any concessions in trade by opening up their market even more to U.S. exports in food or anything else and opened opportunities for the U.S. to engage in the island disputes on the Asia-Pacific region (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2014, 5 February, Serial No. 113 – 123).

To the above statement, Daniel R. Russel, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, replied stating that American commitment and security assistance in the region for its allies was not for sale. However, Washington's engagement in negotiations with Japan through the framework of TPP was a significant economic move and that Japan had made "very significant concessions" and that TPP would enhance exports and trade by "lowering barriers and by bringing high standards to countries like Japan". However, Sherman retorted by saying that free trade agreements have created trade deficit for the U.S.; he cited the example of U.S. trade deficit with South Korea after the U.S. – Korea Free Trade Agreement (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2014, 5 February, Serial No. 113 – 123).

It was evident that the Obama administration wanted China to be out of the TPP but be affected by the trade agreement in a way desirable to the interests of the U.S. in the economic strategic environment of the region. Kurt Tong, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs, U.S. Department of State, at the Subcommittee on East Asia, the Pacific, and International Cybersecurity Policy, of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing, on "Strategic Implications of Trade Promotion and Capacity-Building in the Asia-Pacific Region" on 16 June 2015, stated:

“TPP will also have a broader magnetic effect on the region, beyond its current membership, by encouraging non-members to adopt to open, fair, and transparent trade and investment policies in their efforts to attract new economic partners. The TPP example can help spur them to make reforms to elevate the standards of their trade and investment regimes, and lower tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade and investment” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 16 June, Issue: Vol. 161, No. 96).

Kurt Tong insisted that the Trans-Pacific Partnership was a vital initiative to push the rebalance strategy of the Obama administration forward. He went on to highlight that while TPP was “the center piece” of the ‘rebalance’ strategy, there were other means of the administration at its disposal. And the other mechanisms would also allow the U.S to reach out to those Asian economies “effectively and expand economic ties” with them if they “have not yet volunteered to join TPP, or are not yet ready to meet its standards”. (Congressional Hearings 2015, 16 June, Issue: Vol. 161, No. 96).

Thus, rebalancing towards smaller economies was just as vital as Washington’s security commitment to sustain the rebalancing in the Asia and Pacific region. Building stronger economic ties with Taiwan, which was among America’s top thirteen trading partners, was important even if it got difficult at times due to China’s bullying of Taiwan. India is another difficult country to deal with, said Scissors, resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), before the Subcommittee On East Asia and Pacific Affairs, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, on “Rebalance to Asia IV: Economic Engagement in the Asia-Pacific Region: America’s Best Resource is Our Market”, whenever it comes to the negotiating table. Washington wanted it to undergo fundamental liberalization of its rural land ownership policies, economic exchanges across its own country and labor laws. However, India is not part of TPP. Indonesia and Philippines were two countries still to join the TPP which were important members of ASEAN and had high potential market resources and growth (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2014, 18 December, S. HRG. 113–182).

In addition to the aforementioned assertion, the Indian economy experienced a ramp by becoming one of the swiftly growing economies in the world. However, the India needed

to evaluate whether it would be able to go through the domestic economic-infrastructure changes to benefit from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) (*The Business Standard* 2015). The TPP also did not see the Chinese economy joining it.

However, both the countries needed to undergo changes in their domestic policies to gain from these multilateral and bilateral economic ties at the regional and international levels. The U.S. aimed to be able to tap into the big, rising and fragile but growing economies, as creating and leading the way in bringing about favorable international and regional commercial conditions and trading facilities would built a stronger foundation for rebalancing in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Obama administration's recognition of the need and therefore, the resolution to continue to pursue economic engagement in Asia could not be clearer when then Secretary John Kerry's made the statement:

“If we retreat on trade, our influence on the global economy will diminish. And if our economic stature is in doubt, our ability to deliver on defense and political challenges will be increasingly questioned. In our era, the economic and security realms are absolutely integrated; we simply cannot pull back from one without diminishing our role on the other” (U.S. Embassy in Georgia 2015).

International Trade Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce

When it came to the functioning of domestic administrative mechanisms, according to John Anderson said:

“The Department of Commerce's International Trade Administration (ITA) is one of the primary agencies responsible for strengthening the competitiveness of U.S. industry in the global market, promoting U.S. exports, monitoring compliance with U.S. trade agreements, and enforcing U.S. trade laws. ITA's efforts are driven by the needs of our primary constituency – the U.S. business community. In 2013, seven of our top twenty-one priority export markets were located in Asia and forty-one percent of the clients we counselled worldwide, were interested in doing business in the EAP region. There is little doubt that Asia is a growing market for companies looking to expand their business and ITA continues to engage aggressively on this front” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2013, 18 December, S. HRG. 113–182).

One of the priorities for Department of Commerce in the Asia-Pacific region was to build partnerships and institutions capable of meeting the challenges of the 21st-century while at the same time ensuring market access for U.S. firms. The Obama administration had tried to establish deeper trade and investment ties in the region to support and protect the peace, security, and prosperity of the region. The administration boasted of America's ties with allies such as Japan, the Republic of Korea, Australia and the Philippines, and partners including Thailand in forming a natural cornerstone of U.S. strategic position in the region. It complemented America's multilateral initiatives to guarantee "regional prosperity and development at a time of evolving challenges". It is important to note that the administration, in order to build a more stable relation with Beijing, believed that one of the important elements of America's rebalance policy was to keep on "pursuing a positive, comprehensive, and cooperative relationship with China". ITA also gave importance to regional presence by stationing its own staff or by partnering with other agencies such as the State department. ITA had also been engaged with Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) on a range of issues including trade and investments; ITA also helped represent American industry's interests in TPP negotiations, which also stood strongly on the United States-Korea Free Trade Agreement; ITA also had the duty to link business in the U.S. with foreign buyers; and at the same time, attract FDIs back home and enforce domestic trade laws in dealings with foreign business (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2013, 18 December, S. HRG. 113-182).

Commentaries by experts such as Solis explained that the TPP deal provided opportunities for American business sectors which gained from competitive vigour in areas including agriculture, services, advanced manufacturing in raising their reach in global markets. She, moreover, stated that facets of the Trans Pacific Partnership agreement such as rules on digital financial system, high tariff eradication targets, and elimination to tackle behind-the-border protectionism – all these made the pact more beneficial for the U.S. economy. Solis said, "Projected annual income gains from this trade deal range between \$57 billion and \$131 billion by 2032, compared to a baseline scenario" (Solis 2016). However, since the trade deal was led by America while leaving

out China, supported American businesses. At the same time, Chinese seemed to believe that the aim of the American strategy was to split up China in terms of its territory, politically destabilize it, restrain it and upset it in economical sphere.

On the whole, the Trans Pacific Partnership agreement revealed that the Obama administration's economic engagements in the region was to advance and deepen economic ties with the countries of the region by reducing tariffs and encouraging trade and commerce relations to boost growth. On 22 September 2008, the U.S. declared open negotiations to join TPP, formerly known as Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership agreement (TPSEP) or Pacific-4; it was led by U.S. Trade Representative Susan C. Schwab. After a huge defeat in a vote on TPP in the House of Representatives on 12 June 2015, President Obama, on 24 June 2015, was given the authority to "fast-track" TPP negotiations as the legislation was passed in the Republican-controlled Senate. The fast-track authority permitted President Obama "to present Congress with a complex final package" of the trade deal it would put off the legislature from stopping or altering the text of the agreement (The Guardian 2015). The House of Representatives and Senate were under the control of the Republicans during the last two years of the Obama administration. During this period, the Obama administration continued to fight hard to get the bill ratified in Congress. President Obama was given the "fast-track" authority by the Senate as most democrats struck a deal (to support the Trade Adjustment Assistance) with the Republicans in a rare alliance. By February 2016, 12 countries had already agreed to join the TPP but every country still required ratification for the deal to come into force. Furthermore, in total, the trade agreement represented around 40% of the world's total economic output (Tufts University 2016).

U.S.-China Economic Relations

The economic relationship between the Asian economies and the U.S. is a complex, yet, inescapable one. At the 113th Congress, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, Hearings, titled "America's Future in Asia: From Rebalancing to Managing Sovereignty Disputes" held on 5 February 2014 informed:

“The 35 EAP economies constitute a total population of more than 2.2 billion people with a combined GDP of \$24.5 trillion in 2012. This dynamic region represents 29 percent of global GDP. The Asia and Pacific region is a major market, accounting for 28 percent of U.S. goods and services exports in 2012. Among U.S. merchandise exports, manufactured goods such as electrical machinery, machinery, and aircraft are among the leading products the U.S. exports to EAP countries. Aside from manufactured goods, oil seeds such as soybeans are a major export to the region, most of which go to China” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2014, 5 February, Serial No. 113 – 123).

China became the world’s fastest growing major economy. In 2010, at the 111th Congress, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Hearing, on the topic “United States-China Economic Relations”, the administration predicted that China was going to replace Japan in that same year as the world’s second largest economy. The benefits of open markets became enormous. Washington officials announced that it wanted to enhance prosperity of the peoples of both China and the United States by maintaining a strong and vibrant economic relationship (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2010, 23 June, S. HRG. 111–764). As predicted, China replaced Japan as the second largest economy in the world on 16 August 2010.

According to reports, 2014 saw only 0.9 percent increase in U.S. exports to China, from 2013 (US-China Economic and Security Review Commission 2014). In this way, the U.S. economy suffered trade deficit in goods with China. And increasing deficit was witnessed just in July 2014 at \$30.9 billion which was \$1 billion higher than the July deficit the previous year. Nevertheless, on the bright side for the U.S., American exports to China in goods improved by 6.9 percent year-on-year in July 2014 which surpassed imports which also rose by 3.5 percent (US-China Economic and Security Review Commission 2014).

Thus, East Asia is swiftly changing, mostly stimulated by China’s striking economic growth and expansion of its influence in and around the region. There was undoubtedly an understanding between the Obama administration and Beijing that the economies of the two countries were interdependent and interconnected, and the stakes that both countries had on each other for individual economic prosperity were large. However, at

the same time, David Dollar, Senior Fellow in Foreign Policy, Global Economy and Development at John L. Thornton China Center said:

“Economists generally agree that trade between the United States and China has had negative effects on U.S. manufacturing employment, though estimates of the impact vary. In 2014, the United States imported \$750 billion of goods from these partners and exported a similar amount, \$726 billion. In the same year, the United States imported \$467 billion in goods from China, but exported only \$124 billion. On average, TPP partners are also more open to investment than China’s economy. At the end of 2014, the United States had more than \$1 trillion of foreign investment stock in the TPP partners, 15 times more than its paltry \$67 billion of investment in China” (Dollar 2016).

Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) with China

BIT is an agreement between two countries that sets up “rules of the road” for foreign investment in each other’s countries. BITs give US investors better access to foreign markets—and on fairer terms. The United States currently has BITs with 42 countries (The U.S.-China Business Council, 2014).

The agreement is a high-quality US-China Bilateral Investment Treaty which would provide U.S. companies better access to the Chinese market, and also offer equal rights to American companies similar to the rights the Chinese firms enjoy. Thus, the guarantees provided by the agreement would help American companies in getting better chances to expand in China. China, as explained earlier, has become the world’s second largest economy after the U.S., with a middle class population which is expected to grow to a number that is bigger than the total population of the United States (The U.S.-China Business Council, 2014).

Cheng Li, director at John L. Thornton China Center, opined:

“At the official level, the past eight years of U.S.-China relations have brought an impressive degree of constructive cooperation. From an economic standpoint, post-crisis developments such as China’s massive purchase of U.S. Treasury bonds, the expansion of the U.S.-China Economic and Strategic Dialogue, and the ongoing negotiation of the U.S.-China bilateral investment treaty (BIT) have induced an unprecedented level of economic integration” (Li 2016).

Derek M. Scissors, resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Subcommittee On East Asia and Pacific Affairs on “Rebalance to Asia IV: Economic Engagement in the Asia-Pacific Region: America’s Best Resource is Our Market”, testified that it was not a coincidence that when Japan entered the TPP, the BIT negotiations with China picked up pace. Thus, the agreement when and if settled would set the tone and provide the ground rules for economic engagement between the U.S. and China in the coming years (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2013, 18 December, S. HRG. 113–182).

In April 2009, President Barack Obama and Chinese President Hu Jintao established the Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S&ED) between China and the U.S. In July 2009, the S&ED dialogue was held in Washington but with no progress. The dialogue stood to represent the highest-level bilateral forum between the two economic giants to discuss a broad range of issues to enable advancement and construct constructive, positive and comprehensive relationship between the U.S. and China (Obama 2009).

According to Dr. Daniel B. Wright, Founder, President, and CEO of Green Point Group, then U.S. Treasury Department’s Managing Director for China and the Strategic Economic Dialogue (SED):

“The SED’s most important contribution – that continues today through the S&ED – has been the creation of “new habits of cooperation” between our political leaders – providing more senior, more direct, and more comprehensive communication that matches the growing importance of the U.S.-China relationship. The S&ED contributes to the U.S. rebalance to Asia by strengthening direct Cabinet-secretary level attention and understanding of issues through direct relationship and dialogue with Chinese counterparts” (Kuo 2016).

Free Trade Agreements

A free trade agreement has been generally defined as a treaty signed between two or more countries to set up a free trade region in which trade in goods and services could be carried out by traversing the common borders of these countries, wherein tariffs or hindrances does not exist, however, as opposed to a common market, capital or labour

might not move freely. The countries included as members in such an agreement usually enforce a uniform tariff (termed as common external tariff) or trade with countries that are non-members.²

Another major ally and economic partner of the United States in the region is South Korea. The U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement came into being on 15 March 2012. The country is America's seventh largest trading partner with:

“Approximately \$101 billion in total (two-way) goods trade during 2012. Since entry into force of the KORUS on March 15, 2012, trade data shows that KORUS has bolstered U.S. exports to the ROK. In fact, exports of U.S. manufactured goods to the ROK from January- October, 2013, the latest data available, are 1.6 percent higher than in the same period of 2011, before the FTA. Using the same time periods, the U.S. trade surplus in services with the ROK has grown by 52 percent compared to 2011 and by 21 percent compared to last year” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2013, 18 December, S. HRG. 113–182).

Scot A. Marcial, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, testified before the Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, on 18 December 2013. Marcial praised the U.S. economic engagement and ties in the region with the countries confirming that the promotion of exports, sales and investments by the U.S. provided instant and concrete results for American businesses and thereby the country's economic development and prosperity. He emphasised on the importance of laying the foundation on which the East Asia-Pacific region and the United States could continue to develop with shared prosperity. He also noted that before the formation of the rebalance policy, America was already encouraging a more open trade and investment atmosphere in the region through partnership with economies in APEC and also by methods of full execution of free trade agreements with Singapore (implemented on 1 January 2004.), Australia (came into force on 1 January 2005), and the Republic of Korea (ROK). He remarked:

² Refer to this URL:<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/free-trade-agreement.html>

“Our economic relationship with Singapore is flourishing, with bilateral trade having increased almost 60 percent and U.S. exports by 85 percent since the United States-Singapore FTA entered into force in 2004. While Singapore is host to almost 2,000 U.S. companies, it also accounted for \$26 billion in foreign direct investment stock in the United States at the end of 2012. The United States-Australia Free Trade Agreement has also led to increased trade and investment. The United States is Australia's leading investment partner, with \$132 billion of U.S. investments in Australia and bilateral trade in goods and services has nearly doubled since 2004, topping \$64 billion in 2012. The United States-Korea Free Trade Agreement, or KORUS FTA, is already providing tangible benefits for U.S. manufacturers, workers, and farmers. It is expanding one of the most vibrant trading relationships in the world, one that topped \$130 billion U.S. dollars in goods and services in 2012. We believe that more benefits await.... The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is also an increasingly important U.S. economic partner....these ten countries have a market of approximately 600 million consumers, GDP of more than \$2.2 trillion.... President Obama and the leaders of the ASEAN states welcomed the launch of the Expanded Economic Engagement (E3) initiative. The E3 is a framework for economic cooperation designed to expand trade and investment ties between the United States and ASEAN and to lay the groundwork for ASEAN countries to prepare to join high-standard trade agreements like the TPP” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2013, 18 December, S. HRG. 113–182).

Then, a majority staff report prepared for the use of the committee on foreign relations in 2014 discussed the imbalance of the rebalancing efforts, and therefore, the policy’s struggles. It explained how the military features of the strategy moved forward while leaving behind the non-military aspects such as increasing civilian engagement, empowering U.S. businesses, and strengthening diplomatic partnerships. But due to increased emphasis on the military segment of the policy, the strategy was increasingly perceived more as a military strategy to contain rising China. And as Washington attempts to clarify the strategy by heightening the public diplomacy parts, it was suggested that it should elucidate that the rebalance policy is about expanding U.S. engagement through boosting economic growth, guaranteeing regional security and elevating human welfare across the region to benefit all (U.S. Congressional Hearing, A Majority Staff Report 2014).

In his testimony, Kurt Tong also reaffirmed that there were many reasons why the Obama administration was dedicated to advancing America’s economic engagement with Asia. He defined the U.S. engagement with Asia-Pacific region as “deep, enduring, and

expanding, covering many more issues and programs.” He went on to say that American businesses in the region were “the largest source of foreign investment in East Asia and the Pacific,” and that the U.S. government played a vital role in market expansion. The U.S. also provided “hundreds of millions of dollars in assistance” annually to the region. He stated:

“Our economic engagement with Asia creates new opportunities for growth at home, and strengthens our strategic presence abroad. It helps to build more stable societies by encouraging governments to strengthen rule of law. It supports our trade and investment goals by promoting laws and institutions that secure property rights, enforce contracts, and fight corruption. By the same token, our strategic presence in Asia – our alliances, our trade agreements, our ability to provide security and reassurance to our friends – ensures that our partners in the region maintain confidence in our leadership for peace and prosperity” (U.S. Congressional Hearings 2015, 16 June, Issue: Vol. 161, No. 96).

Conclusion

President Barack Obama during his first term in office, made “rebalance” policy toward the Asia-Pacific a strategic priority of his administration. The original articulation had been “pivot” to Asia strategy, which had seemed to suggest that the US was coming back to Asia. Then, the administration changed the term to “rebalance” to the Asia-Pacific region as it did not want allies and partners in other regions to misinterpret the move as underplaying their strategic importance to the US. Clearly, the unveiling of this policy was to reiterate that the United States never left the Asia-Pacific region. Obama as per his campaign promise, tried to put the U.S. on the path to economic recovery and, at the same time, roll out a grand American foreign policy strategy to secure its interests abroad. In this, the focus on the Asia Pacific was a logical choice, given that it was a booming region with tremendous geostrategic significance. It is in this context that this thesis examined the US policy towards the Asia-Pacific, and how it evolved. Survey of literature on the topic revealed how several theorists and analysts seriously debated on the role of the US in the aftermath of the Cold War and its relative decline. The study in chapter 1, thus, deals with the research problems/questions that the thesis has examined and analyzed.

The US policy towards the Asia-Pacific were, to a large extent, based on decisions made by the key officials of the administration were important. They affected the policy outcome to a significant extent. As discussed in chapter 1 and 2, between 2009 and 2011, President Obama employed the policy of “strategic reassurances” towards China as advised by then Deputy Secretary of State James B. Steinberg and then Senior Director for East Asia on the National Security Council, Jeffrey Bader. This presented the idea that development of successful relationship between the US and China was important to maintain American leadership in the region. On the other hand, another group led by then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton along with then Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell, a number of Defence Department officials as well as National Security Advisor Thomas Donilon were more inclined to the idea that China’s rising power needed to be restrained and that the countries in the Asia-Pacific region must be cautious about Beijing’s assertiveness. As the Obama administration

started interacting with Beijing, Washington's efforts to pursue greater cooperation was not reciprocated by Beijing. For instance, when President Obama visited China in November 2009, the results were not satisfactory as China continued to increase its assertiveness in the region and made negligible efforts to improve its relations with the US. As these chapters further revealed, the stage was set for President Obama to launch the "pivot" policy which came to be known as "rebalance" policy to the Asia-Pacific. The group led by then Secretary Hillary was vital in announcing and implementing the policy. However, the then Secretary John Kerry stepped into office of Department of State in Obama's second term, he supported this same view of constraining China through a "Pacific Partnership" while his focus was diverted to challenges to Europe and the Middle East.

President Obama was also well aware of the fact that the country needed to be strong in and out; even both the political parties- Republicans and the Democrats agreed with this fact. Getting support at home was not easy for Obama in order to allocate resources to push forward the policy, as the US had just come out of a severe economic crisis. America did not have enough wealth and financial stability to sponsors the policy wherein the whole of the country's foreign policy machineries was involved. The American leadership was also constrained to tackle the domestic issues first as compared to international problems.

Nevertheless, the "rebalance" policy was one of the rare policies that enjoyed a bipartisan support for the most part. Much effort was demanded from Washington during both the terms of the Obama administration as the policy evolved and faced hurdles in its implementation. During the second term of the administration, the "rebalance" policy experienced a bumpy ride, to a certain level, due to lack of point-persons like then Secretary of State Clinton, then Assistant Secretary Campbell and senior members in the Senate who understood the policy and the region more deeply, complexities and deadlock in the Congress, lack of clear focus in the execution of the "rebalance" policy, increasing difficulty to deal with China as Xi Jinping turned out to be tougher to deal with than his predecessor, deficiency of resources and appearance of other problems or distractions to

deal with in other regions of the world like in Europe (e.g., Ukraine crisis) and the West Asia (e.g., ISIS problems) where scarce resources needed to be diverted.

In fact, the allies such as Japan, South Korea, Australia and the Philippines and partners such as Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia of the United States in the region welcomed Obama administration's finely tuned and amplified focus on Asia-Pacific region as a Pacific power in light of various events, primarily, China's increasing assertiveness in regional affairs, existing fragile security scenario due to North Korea's provocation and various political-security challenges in the region. These countries throughout the region wanted American support and assurance with regards to security and military needs, economic and political assistance. As discussed in chapter 3 and 4, the Obama administration also took steps to bring the two allies - Japan and South Korea closer. Thus, the rebalance policy did not keep its focus on China only, but diluted it to encompass the entire region as it wanted to give emphasis on reviving old allies and partnerships while building new ones to counter China. The Obama administration's rebalance policy also reflected a post-WWII approach. In this manner, the administration did not want to deal directly with China as a threat (Chapter 3). This was a symbolic blunder which shut various doors to constructive relations between the US and China that also led to polarization in the region.

Rebalancing policy had three key aspects to it – political/diplomatic, military/security and economic aspects. One of the aims of the study was to critically assess how the Obama administration wanted to combine soft and hard power. Further, it looked into how implementing “smart power” in revitalizing the US relations with allies and partners in the region was dependent on the idea of the capability of the American leadership in bringing about a liberal order in the region which would lead to stability and prosperity. As found in chapter 3, the concept of smart power included alliances, partnerships, public diplomacy, institutions, economic integration, global development and technological innovation. However, in reality, the military aspect of the policy heavily tilted the balance of the “rebalance policy”. For instance, America's relations with Australia was revived which was manifested in the announcement to deploy American troops to the country on a rotational basis. The study also found that the Obama's administration wanted to

provide conceptual legitimacy, institutional structure, and budgetary assistance enough to give a solid foundation to the policy, even if there were various shortcomings in executing the policy. This effort definitely gave the impression that Washington tried to revive its legitimacy as the most powerful player in the Asia-Pacific region.

Obama's visit to peace memorial and Hiroshima as well as the QDR 2010, Japan's 2010 National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG) (2010) and the DoD guidance 2012 revealed the heightened emphasis placed by Obama on the US and Japan relations. The policy, further, reflected an endeavour to improve bilateral relations with the Philippines which was reflected in the Manila declaration 2011. Notably, the US and the Philippines reached an agreement on a defence pact on April 2014 revealing that the rebalance policy included a revisiting of military relations with core allies of the region.

Another important military move was the decision taken in July 2016 when the Obama administration went into an agreement with South Korea to deploy the Terminal High-Altitude Air Defense (THAAD) system to shield and defend the Republic of Korea. This was indicative of Washington's growing commitment to its allies in the region. Other important bilateral achievements included "2012 Joint Vision Statement for the Thai-U.S. Defense Alliance" between U.S. and Thailand. The weight of these developments was reflected in the administration's declaration that the government's future budget reduction in the defence spending would not affect the strategic deployment in the Asia-Pacific region. The "rebalance" strategy, initially, was not all about military engagements in the region. However, one of the major factors which increased military competition in the region was the introduction of the Air-Sea Battle by Washington. This was viewed by China as a military doctrine by the US to contain Beijing's military expansion in the region.

As discussed in Chapter 4, North Korea continued testing its nuclear arsenals and threatened the United States' security, and the progress made in guiding the country to reach its goal of reducing its nuclear arsenals was halted. Other initiatives to restrain North Korea's nuclear weapons build up including the Six-Party talks came to a standstill. The region was observed to be headed toward a new era of arms race. With

China's rise in military power and North Korea's uncompromising attitude; the countries in the region, out of security concerns, tilted toward a more realist approach by speeding up in acquiring sophisticated up-to-date weaponry. The American allies showed that they depended on the U.S. to give them security protection; however, at the same time, they were not entirely taking chances. In the light of China's military buildup, Shinzo Abe revealed the need to reinterpret and push for greater autonomy to project military power beyond Japan's territories. This chapter also revealed congressional and expert views of the military aspect of the policy. The study found that Congress and experts were worried about China's expansionist motives and military growth, and North Korea's increasing missile threats to the US. It was also observed that the military aspect of the rebalance policy suffered from lack of adequate resource allocations in implementing it.

Furthermore, on the political front, the visit to Myanmar by President Obama in 2012 was a turning point towards a positive construction of relations between the two countries. This led to easing of constraints on aid toward Burma and the announcement of exchange of ambassadors between the U.S. and Burma. In November 2012, continuing his regional focus, President Obama became the first American president to visit Cambodia; he also lifted the four-decade long arms ban on Vietnam in May 2016. In September 2016, President Obama became the first sitting American President to visit Laos to rebuild relations and trust by acknowledging that both the countries suffered from the US' secret war in the past. All these efforts showed that the Obama administration attempted to convey the message to its allies and partners that it would stay engaged and committed in the region. However, the dynamics in Asia-Pacific was rendered more complicated due to China's economic clout and economic interconnectedness between China and the other countries of the region.

It was also revealed that the administration believed that the Southeast Asian region was an important component of the policy and that the focus could not only be limited to Northeast Asia. The chapter also found out that during President Obama's first tenure in office, the U.S. government highlighted and paid substantial attention to the various bilateral, minilateral and multilateral agreements in the region, especially, to the Southeast Asian countries more than ever. The administration was focused on taking part

in the formation of regional rules and norms of engagement in these various regional structures, with the emergence of China's influence as a regional and global power. For instance, America's decision to join the EAS, the ASEAN Defense Minister's Meeting and the signing of the ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation were momentous.

Rebalance policy evoked support of long-term allies who had common values and goals such as Japan, South Korea Australia, and the Philippines, even if President Rodrigo Duterte's relations with Washington experienced instability, especially in 2016 when Manila announced that it would leave the alliance by putting an end to joint military and naval exercises, and also asked the US to pull out its soldiers from the Philippines. The study found that it reflected China's growing influence in the neighbourhood as Manila wanted to appease China. Duterte also disliked America slamming him for human rights abuse. However, relations between the US and the Philippines ran deeper than temporary upheavals and relations between two presidents.

Some countries like Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam were hesitant, even when the Obama administration reached out to them. The Obama administration, furthermore, went through uncertain periods in its relationship with America's traditional ally Thailand. It came to a point when these countries, that remained ambivalent to completely support the rebalance policy, had to choose between the US and China, while India was perceived as a swing state (Chapter 3). In the discussion of the political aspect of the Asia-Pacific policy, its outreach to India was noteworthy.

Washington escalated its engagement and relations with India which it proclaimed as a natural ally in South Asia. Even the inclusion of the 'Indian ocean' and its adjacent areas in its broad geographical strategic framework was an important shift in recognizing the growing significance of India to the region. The geographical span that the policy covered was a large space. It extended over the Asia and Pacific region, from the Indian Ocean to the Americas. With the Indian Ocean's enormous relevance, India's part was significant in cementing the policy's fate. The U.S. relations with India had been improving since the end of Cold War. President Obama pursued New Delhi more than ever to bring India to his Asia pivot its policy by integrating it entirely and constructively

into the Asian order. India was also increasingly showing its interest in the affairs of East Asia through its “Look East” policy or “Act East” policy. In 2011, then Secretary of State Clinton, during her India visit, suggested that a “new silk road” initiative should be developed with India’s partnership for Central Asia. However, there was no solid outcome with any financial assistance regarding it. The intersection of interests between the two countries heightened their cooperation. It is worth mentioning that the whole new ‘rebalancing’ strategy had important roles for countries such as India, Vietnam and Burma. In January 2015, President Obama became the first sitting US President to have visited India two times. He attended India’s Republic Day parade as the Chief Guest.

However, the rebalance policy was not able to reduce increasing tensions in the East and South China Sea. It was also not able to lessen the nuclear weapons threats emerging from North Korea. Instead, tensions in the region escalated as China believed it needed to challenge America’s presence in the region. North Korea also felt the need to build its nuclear capability to have greater bargaining ability with the US. In this region, Russia also was a competitor which could not be ignored. Russia was attempting to benefit from the region through healthy diplomatic relations with the countries of the region especially with China, and at the same time, avoid any possible conflict with Washington. It also looked as if Russian involvement in the region reflected another perception that was, Russia and China converging against America’s rebalancing effort in order to sustain China’s wider presence in the region. This was recognized as a reaction to America’s rebalancing process (Chapter 4).

The policy’s creation was also influenced by many international events, especially the in Asia-Pacific. Some events were as follows: the 2008 financial crisis, 2008 Summer Olympics in China that boosted Beijing’s confidence, escalation of tensions in the South and East China Sea region, increasing provocation by North Korea, creation of the Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) by China. It became fundamental for the Obama administration to acknowledge East Asia’s growing strategic importance, the shifting geopolitics of the region and America’s position in the region. The position of the United States, with the decline of its unipolar moment, felt increasingly susceptible to new strategic challenges. The 2008 global recession, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan took a

heavy toll on the American image, reputation and economy. Thus, to revive America's leadership and relevance, the Obama administration formulated the rebalance policy to the region.

It was found that the rebalancing strategy was not presented in a comprehensive manner to the congress and the public (chapter 1, 3, 4 and 5). Thus, regrettably, the policy suffered from lack of transparency when presented either to the Congress, the American people or the allies and partners and foes in the region. For instance, the content of the TPP was kept a secret that it was not available to the public or the Congress for deliberation and debate. Nevertheless, even if the influence Congress and public have on the US foreign policy is minimal and invisible at times, they are still relevant. Also, the "rebalance" policy recognized China's growing power, and accordingly, in the process integrated and implemented fundamental American interests in the policy to hedge China while seeking to cooperate with the Asian power. One of the many mistakes the Obama administration made with the rebalance policy was not clearly stating that China was the threat the administration wanted to deal with. It did not put in much effort to deal with China directly in issues – bilateral or regional – that were important. Instead, Washington diluted the process by including various countries in the region by reaching out to them to influence and assist in restraining China. China perceived this as a bigger threat than just dealing with the US.

Also, an overall understanding of the non-military elements of the strategy was indispensable in providing a wider and clearer view of the policy. The process of implementing the policy in the Asia-Pacific theatre was a complicated one as the U.S. sent mixed messages to its allies/partners and its opponents at the same time. China increasingly saw the "rebalance" policy as constraining and countering policy to its rise as a regional and global player in the midst of changing power relations, norms and regional institutions in the region. Asia witnessed China's rapidly growing influence in political affairs (regional and global) combined with increasing military capabilities impelled by booming economic strength. Countries in the region were left ambivalent when it came to choosing between the US and China as they needed economic assistance from Beijing who was culturally and geographically closer.

No matter the challenges posed against the United States in Asia and the Pacific, to achieve victory in Asia, Obama needed to triumph domestically. In the last few years of the Obama administration, it remained much more inward-looking as it faced many other domestic problems in Congress, including its tussle with the unions and the left. Improvement of American credibility was, however, very essential during the Obama administration in order to remain as the hegemonic stabilizer in the Asia-Pacific.

The study found that the Obama administration not only withdrew troops from Iraq and from Afghanistan, by the end of 2014, it was also trying to slim down the defense budget in accordance to review of its defense strategy. This was a by-product of the then harsh fiscal situation. Even if the dreaded “fiscal cliff” which was expected to happen at the beginning of 2013 was evaded, it hardly helped Washington in reducing the mounting federal deficit. This affected Congress’ decision on allocating funds for furthering ‘soft power’ efforts, but not so much on defence spending as declared by Washington officials. However, the policy lacked appropriate resource allocation overall. Keeping the funding flowing was an ongoing challenge for the administration to deal with. It also determined the management of the various trade-offs. America needed to revive its economy, and it assessed that economic engagement and investment in the Asia-Pacific region was going to help the economy. Nevertheless, the rebalance policy lacked innovative and forward-looking elements and instead continued with elements of a status quo.

However, it was found that despite the aim of the rebalance policy, the administration also failed in its attempt to ensure that no single regional power would dominate. The Chinese aggressive activities increased in the region. In Chapter 1 and 2, experts such as Fareed Zakaria, Charles Krauthammer, John Ikenberry, Kenneth Waltz and Christopher Layne argued that America’s unipolarity was challenged by Asia’s rising powers, especially China, in the first decade of the 21st century. It was also found that the Obama administration witnessed the arrival of a multipolar world order. Beijing’s One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative (2013), Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) (2014), Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement (RCEP) initiative, A2AD capability, militarization of artificial islands, increased number of sorties over South China Sea and China’s dismissal of the international tribunal ruling in the South China

Sea dispute with the Philippines in 2016. It was also found that China competed against the rebalancing policy by launching various economic initiatives in Asia-Pacific, which was a wiser move, rather than competing by militarization, except in the South China Sea. All these proved that the US rebalancing policy was not able to contain China (hypothesis 1).

The second hypothesis, however, has been proven valid. It was true that through the rebalancing strategy, the US significantly aligned Asia's economic development to security strategy against China. The policy was able to influence trade and commerce agreements in the region to bend them to the benefit of the U.S.' core strategic interests in the region. China being one of the largest markets for American products and services and the second biggest economy in the world, Washington's intentions became more of selected involvement with "latent hostility" towards Beijing. Tension and co-operation continued to accompany the relations between both the countries. Beijing believed that America would not last long in the region as it (China) was there to stay. However, since both the parties mutually benefit from each other and are dependent on trade and commerce between them, there was no Cold-War-type of confrontation.

Chapter 5 found that the Obama administration attempted to use the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) to bring allies and partners together in one grouping against China to constrain its rise and influence in the region. It discussed economic relations between the US and China, developments such as the free trade agreement (FTA) that came into effect between Washington and Seoul in 2012; the decision of United States in 2010 to lead the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Free Trade Agreement negotiations. The TPP was an advancement of the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership (TPSEP) which included Singapore, Brunei, Chile and New Zealand. The negotiation for a FTA with the TPSEP member states was suggested by the United States in September 2008. Eventually, allies of the United States such as Australia, Vietnam, Malaysia and Peru joined in supporting the negotiation. The study, therefore, concluded that all of these countries who went into formal negotiations commencing in March 2010, would support the US initiatives in the region. The TPP did not take off during the Obama administration period due to several reasons including gridlock in Congress, Bilateral

Investment Treaty (BIT) between the US and China also suffered. Both the agreements were considered to be connected. The administration concluded FTAs with some of its allies and partners and strengthened strategic relations. The economic aspect was vital to the success of the rebalance policy; however, the failure of TPP was a huge blow to the strategy. Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) was doomed to fail since the beginning. President Obama, first of all, did not support free trade in 2008, and the administration started implementing the policy from 2012. It was found that many lawmakers and American public were not supportive of the TPP as it was highly secretive and believed it would lead to job losses.

Throughout, the study also attempted to seek the limitations of the policy. As evidence revealed, there were several limitations. Firstly, the policies of the Obama administration were perceived as counterbalancing China's economic and military growth. Further, Beijing also posed a challenge to Washington's interests in the region on issues such as Taiwan, South China Sea, North Korea's nuclear behavior and Washington's relations with alliances partners. Certainly, the competition between the United States and China became recognizable as China also started accelerated its economic expansion. For instance, the Obama administration was not able to restrain China from building islands in the South China Sea. China also openly refused to accept the UN court ruling on China's claim of the Spratly Islands as illegal. The Philippines was another claimant in the dispute, however, did not accept the ruling as it wanted to appease Beijing. In the South China Sea, another party in the disputes – Taiwan – was also observed to be beefing up military presence in Itu Aba Islands. China's increasing assertiveness was also witnessed in Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea with Japan as the other party in the dispute. Thus, stability in the region was becoming more fragile. The United States could not contribute in drawing up a realistic and comprehensive framework to help deal with territorial disputes in the region which stirred up drawn out hostilities along with problems of growing nationalism in the South China Sea. Regional stability upon which the countries were surviving, thus far was being seriously questioned. In the final analysis, the policy while well conceived had vulnerabilities in implementation as it involved both domestic and international actors.

The study also found that the Obama administration's failure to launch TPP, the cornerstone of the rebalance policy, enabled and legitimized China's position as the paramount economic power in the Asia-Pacific region. It also confirmed US' decline in its role as a superpower in the region. the biggest limitation for this policy has been the approach of the Trump administration.

The study showed that the best way to deal with regional political and security questions is through the conduct of active diplomacy and productive engagement. The Trump Administration, however, has no intention to pursue proactive and focused engagement in this region with the Obama policy. After the election of President Trump, the U.S. continued to dealing with North Korea and has tried to avoid escalation of military competition in the East Asian region and deal directly with China in issues such as trade, territorial sovereignty, climate change and non-proliferation. The "rebalance" policy succeeded to a certain extent in building channels of communication between Washington and the countries of the region, the new administration could continue to build on them to bolster its leadership and assure its allies support instead of creating uncertainty in the region. Trump administration needs to take into account traditional and non-traditional security threats emanating from the region and articulate effective policy to eliminate or contain them. The study has revealed that the United States still faces serious challenges in the Asia and Pacific region. Moreover, it cannot be forgotten that domestic support and approval of the regional allies and partners make a strong backbone of any foreign policy.

Trump administration's adoption of America First policy and the abandonment of TPP have been seen as America's withdrawal from its responsibilities in the region. President Trump formulated Washington's foreign policy strategy by putting American interests first, especially to revitalize the American economy, wherein it would conclude trade deals when it benefits the US economy and the American workers. He initially asked the allies and partners to share the burden of maintaining regional security and stability in Asia-Pacific. However, he backpedalled from that rhetoric. He has not abandoned the alliance system but has been reinforcing relations between US' allies and partners at bilateral levels. His administration, in fact, has been giving importance to maintaining

ties with the regional structures including ASEAN and EAS. President Trump has also been making efforts to strengthen American military capabilities with modernized nuclear arsenals in the region. This came in the light of the rising instability in West Asia and escalation of tensions due to North Korean nuclear missile threats and Chinese aggressive military activity in the South China Sea. The Trump administration has pushed for increased military exercises with its allies and partners in the region. Another important development is the agreement reached between the US, Japan, India and Australia in 2017 to form the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or Quad to protect freedom of navigation stretching from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific. The Trump administration has also replaced the term Asia-Pacific with Indo-Pacific which showed India's increasing strategic importance in the region. The relations between the US and India has been upgraded to a strategic and defense partner and Washington also termed India a global power. In 2017, the Trump Administration published its National Security Strategy document in which China was described as "a strategic competitor" (The White House 2017).

In the constantly changing strategic Asia-Pacific landscape, an important development was President Trump meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in June 2018 in Singapore. This marked a watershed moment in history in the Korean peninsula and the region as a whole. However, the outcomes of the summit lacked clarity in terms of the agreements and targets set to be achieved as it did not guarantee North Korea's denuclearization. However, the US remains committed to building trust with North Korea based on this historic diplomatic breakthrough.

On trade, the Trump Administration has not isolated itself from Asia-Pacific. The Administration wants to enter into fair trade deals with important economies in the region including Japan, South Korea, Australia, India and China, and negotiate the terms to benefit the US economy. "America first" and "Buy America" are the big slogans raised by the Trump Administration even in Asia-Pacific with the intention to rearrange America's economic relations in the region. The Republican government has pursued a more pragmatic, selective and America first foreign policy strategies that might not be clubbed under one grand strategic banner but applied meticulously depending on the

situation or issue. Thus, the importance and salience of the Asia-Pacific region to the US foreign policy remains high.

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