

# Analysis of Changes in United States Foreign Policy the Era of the Barack Obama Government

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## ABSTRACT

This article explains the foreign policy of the Republic of the United States in the Asia Pacific region which is studied through analysis of epistemological, ontological and axiological aspects. This article tries to look at the reasons for the United States changing the focus of its foreign policy from the Middle East to the Asia Pacific Region. In the regional dynamics that occur, China plays an important role along with increasing its national capabilities. In this regard, this article will discuss and provide an explanation of the foreign policy created by America, namely the Asian Pivot, using an analytical framework based on the Balance of Threat theory with the application of the United States' offshore balancing strategy to the Asia-Pacific region. In addition, this article analyzes funnel causality, namely the sources that form the basis of United States policy making in the Asia Pacific. The United States is a very unique country in terms of its political system both at home and abroad, its foreign policy is able to influence the world political landscape. This research is qualitative in nature using a textual study method by analyzing secondary data from various related literature. The results of the literature study show that changes in the focus of American foreign policy were due to factors China's increasing national capabilities are seen as a challenge to United States national interests.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The end of the Cold War, marked by the collapse of the Soviet Union, made the United States the only superpower in the world. Of course, this is also supported by the stability of the United States in various sectors, including human resources, natural resources, industry, technology, military and government [1]. To maintain the security stability of the country, the United States created a military strategy policy in the form of defense and security cooperation. This

strategy begins by looking for areas that are considered strategic, one of the areas chosen by the United States is the Asia Pacific region [2].

The Asia Pacific region is starting to experience significant progress, especially in the economic and military fields. In the economic field, this progress can be seen with the formation of economic cooperation between countries in the Asia Pacific, namely APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation) which was founded in 1989 and in the military field it is marked by military cooperation

between countries in the Asia Pacific. In addition, this progress has an impact on political stability and security in the Asia Pacific region. One of them is the claim of sovereignty over territorial waters in the East China Sea and South China Sea, which has become a potential conflict which is quite worrying for regional countries.

Based on the conditions of instability in the region, it strengthens the United States' policy to carry out defense cooperation with several countries in the Asia Pacific in the form of building military bases and deploying military troops. Several countries that carry out defense cooperation with the United States are Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Singapore and Australia. This proves that the United States is trying to maintain its interests in the Asia Pacific region through defense cooperation.

The re-election of President Obama for the second term of his administration since November 2012, provides the opportunity and momentum for the US to further enhance various diplomatic initiatives in the Asia Pacific region, especially with the US rebalancing strategy and strategic pivot in this region considering US foreign policy in Asia. During Barack Obama's first administration, the Pacific was considered too low profile compared to other regions. The deteriorating condition of the US domestic economy was also a factor that prevented the US from carrying out its foreign policy more optimally during the first term of its administration. On November 17 2011 or during the first period of his administration, Obama issued these words and doctrines:

*"Here, we see the future. As the world's fastest-growing region -- and home to more than half of the global economy -- the Asia Pacific is critical to achieving my highest priority, and that's creating jobs and opportunity for the American people."*

President Obama's speech above shows how the Asia Pacific region is seen as the center of international activity in the 21st Century. The activities experienced by Asia Pacific countries will certainly give rise to constellations. Constellation here means the many possibilities that occur. With the existing complexity, the possibility of conflict

or cooperation will be greater. This gives rise to interactions that not only involve relations between countries, but also interactions between the international community. Therefore, Obama's words are intended so that US foreign policy steps can run smoothly in this region, so the distribution of the US military is now starting to shift, from Iraq and Afghanistan to the Asia Pacific region. In the midst of an economic recession that has not yet ended, the United States certainly has an interest in expanding its role to the Asia Pacific. The region is very important for the future of the US economy, so it continues to strive to become a major power in the Asia Pacific. That is why the US established a military base and placed its marine troops in Darwin, Australia [3].

One form of United States defense and security cooperation in the Asia Pacific was the formation of the ANZUS (Australia, New Zealand, United States of America) defense pact on September 1 1951 in San Francisco, and was briefly inactive. As time went by, this relationship improved again on November 16 2011. Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard together with United States President Barack Obama announced increased defense cooperation between the United States and Australia by placing 2,500 United States Marine personnel at Robertson Barracks, Darwin, Australia.

The change in focus was carried out by approaching the alliance countries, through state visits and cooperative dialogue in various fields, especially inter-governmental security. The Asia Pacific region is the focus of changes in United States foreign policy because it is considered to be experiencing significant developments, especially in the economic and military fields. This development raises the possibility of political and security impacts, both the possibility of conflict and cooperation between countries in the region, considering the many opportunities and challenges in the era of globalization. Officially, the United States implemented a rebalancing strategy policy taken from the Balance of Threat and Offshore Balancing theories which were then focused on the Asia Pacific region. Thus, the

focus of United States foreign policy is no longer on the Middle East but on Asia.

## 2. THEORITICAL REVIEW

The theoretical framework coined by Stephen M. Walt the Balance of threat theory emphasizes balancing efforts to overcome existing threats, not balancing the opponent's strength. To see the level of threat from other parties. Balance of threat has a measuring power to see how far the opponent's strength and national strength are to balance the threat. There are four things that can be used as a measure of a country's strength to impact threats, namely the total strength of the country (aggregate power), geographical proximity, offensive military capability (offensive power), and being able to show an aggressive nature towards opponents (perceived aggressiveness) [4]. These four things are what China now has and are a threat to the United States.

Stephen Walt stated that the intention of seriousness plays a big role in choosing an alliance, even though a country has moderate capacity, it can invite other countries to balance if they feel threatened. Walt gave an example when explaining why the coalition that defeated Germany during World War One and the world became stronger than its opponents. This is because Germany and its alliances are a strong power (according to the weaker ones) and make other countries create a form of strong alliance to respond to its threat. Threat imbalance occurs when the most threatening country or coalition is significantly more dangerous than the second country or coalition. The level of threat from one country to another is the number of its forces, geographical proximity, ability to attack, and intensity of aggressiveness.

The purpose of a country entering into an alliance is to prevent domination from a larger power where the country will join to protect itself from countries or alliances that have large resources that could be a threat to their country. There are 2 big reasons why countries want to join an alliance: (1) It will be very risky for the survival of a country if it

fails to curb a potential hegemony before it becomes strong. (2) Forging alliances with countries that are easily attacked will increase influence over new members. Therefore, they need more help, which is why power is not the only factor that makes a country want to join an alliance or form an alliance. A country is more willing to join forces to fight a country that is potentially threatening than a country that has great power [4].

Furthermore, the Offshore Balancing policy model coined by Walt is a strategy or policy launched by the United States to directly control the internal processes of other countries by collaborating with several countries to form an alliance to achieve their interests. This strategic concept was originally used by realist analysis in international relations, where it describes great power supported by a large and strong territory. This policy requires limiting the presence of United States troops in other countries because it could cause anger, acts of terrorism, and threaten the country's freedom [5]. This model actually has similarities to the same balance of threat theory see the level of threat by forming alliances, which is a response to the threat imbalance. With the development of China's economy which is a threat to America. However, the balance of threat says that balancing is a response carried out by countries towards other countries that have greater power than that country.

Before the policy strategy model was created, the process of making United States foreign policy involved various sources that were interconnected with each other and this caused foreign policy making to be more complex, as in the analytical framework created by Eugene, namely the Funnel of Causality consisting of external sources, societal sources, governmental sources, role sources, and individual sources [6]. American policy making in the Asia Pacific is also influenced by several sources, namely external sources, societal sources, and individual sources. Eugene's model can be seen in the image below.

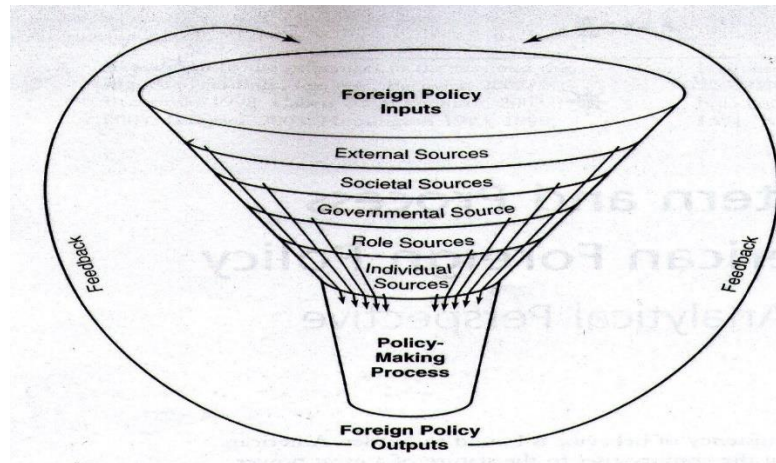


Figure 1. Eugene's model

### 3. RESEARCH METHODS

The research approach used is a qualitative descriptive approach. By using library research methods, this data collection method is a secondary data collection technique where the data obtained is taken, analyzed and quoted from various sources. Secondary data is data obtained indirectly from literature sources that support the proposal. This research uses secondary data, through scientific books or research results, documents, journals, articles, newspapers and other documents relevant to this research

### 4. DISCUSSION

#### a. Ontology

Ontology is the part of philosophy that studies regarding something that exists or general principles regarding something that exists, defining a concept in a particular science.

Initially, the Asia Pivot policy was introduced by United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at the end of 2011. The Asia Pivot or Asia rebalancing policy was based on changing the focus of United States foreign policy from the transatlantic and Middle East regions to the Asia-Pacific region. This change in orientation was driven by the increasing dynamics of relations between countries in the Asia Pacific

due to increased economic and military capabilities. Thus, this policy was taken to maintain leadership, secure interests and develop American values in the Pacific Ocean region. One way to achieve the Asia Pivot is to strengthen bilateral alliance cooperation and increase military presence in the region. Strengthening cooperation is based on the shared needs between alliance countries to achieve mutual security. China is considered a source of threat for various reasons, ranging from territorial disputes, non-transparent military budgets, to military modernization which is starting to show superiority over other countries' militaries [7]. Increasing military presence is important because it will ensure that China will not take assertive actions that could trigger open conflict.

Until 2014, the United States had strategic security cooperation with several countries, namely Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Singapore and Australia. In addition to security agreements, the United States has approximately 325,000 troops throughout the Pacific region, in Japan 40,000 troops, South Korea 28,500 troops, Hawaii 40,000 troops, Australia 2,500 troops, and Guam 5,000 troops. In 2015 Hawaii will

receive an additional 2,700 troops and a naval logistics base in Singapore will be activated. Integrating the restructuring of defense posture with efforts to improve the economy is an important part of Pivot Asia policy. It can be seen from the deployment of US marine troops in Darwin, this is the third in the Asia Pacific region after Guam and Okinawa, Japan. Geographically, these three areas apparently circle China's territory. This means that Obama is trying to carry out containment politics against China, which is considered increasingly aggressive in the Asia Pacific region [8].

Since World War II the United States has succeeded in guaranteeing freedom of navigation in the Pacific, which has encouraged increased trade in the region. Ensuring security and freedom of navigation will help a region's economic growth. This can be seen by the opening of a naval military base in Singapore which has a strategic position in the Malacca Strait trade route. The World Bank projects that the Asia-Pacific region will contribute 40% of global economic growth and increase to 50% in the next two decades. This rapid economic increase will give birth to hundreds of millions of new middle classes who have the ability and need to consume on a large scale.

#### b. Epistemology

Epistemology is the part of philosophy that studies about discusses how to gain knowledge from the object in mind, the ways in which a concept is carried out, the meaning of knowledge or a description of knowledge.

America's behavior in carrying out a balancing strategy through its policies is a form of US insecurity regarding the increasing capabilities that China has experienced in the last few decades.

This sense of insecurity is reflected in the operationalization of the Balance of Threat theory with the Offshore Balancing strategy which can be said to be a force threat by China. The balancing strategy carried out by the US through strengthening military alliances is an appropriate strategy to narrow China's space to dominate the Asia Pacific region. This is because the use of strategy will benefit America because it can still maintain its dominance as the strongest country among its alliance countries in the Asia Pacific region [9].

The United States maintains defense and security cooperation with several of its alliance countries in the Asia Pacific. This defense and security cooperation takes the form of building military bases and placing United States military troops in its alliance countries. There are at least five reasons for the existence of US military bases in the Pacific Ocean if examined based on the theory of balance of threat and Offshore Balancing [10]:

First, because currently the development of the Asia Pacific region is very dynamic, especially in the economic sector. Asia Pacific has become a new magnet for the US, which has for years focused its attention on the Middle East and Persian Gulf regions. Not to mention that the US economic condition is currently being hit by a serious debt crisis and the European Union's trading partners are also in dire economic conditions. Second, the emergence of China as the second largest economic power in the world, rivaling the US, is considered by the US to increase China's military strength to protect its economic interests. Third, India as a new power from Asia apart from China is also a factor that encourages the US to pay great attention to this region. Fourth, ASEAN countries with areas rich in

natural potential, namely minerals and oil and gas, have become an attraction for big countries to intervene to achieve their respective interests. The South China Sea (SCS) is an area that is currently being targeted by the US and China because of its abundant mineral and oil and gas content. Fifth, the SCS area which is being disputed by nearby countries, namely the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam and China (which also claim, even though their position is relatively far away) which is also being targeted by the US, turns out to also be a sea route, a trade route between countries. Asia. The value of trade through this route every year reaches 5.3 trillion US dollars, with 1.2 trillion US dollars being the trade value of the United States.

Funnel of Causality Analysis, The process of making United States policy in the Asia Pacific is influenced by several sources other than national interest, namely:

1. External sources, such as the influence of public issues, the country, developing issues, challenges from outside.
2. Individual sources, such as the influence of the president and executive orders.
3. Societal sources, such as influence from society, political parties, NGOs, interest groups, press, media and public figures.

#### 1. Societal Sources

The source of these societal considerations comes from the conditions of domestic society in the United States, it could also be from the mass media which plays an important role as well as from interest groups which then become considerations for the President of the United States in making or deciding on a policy. And what is no less important is the political

party the President comes from. Obama adopted the Offshore Balancing policy with very supportive public conditions because in this way, he could improve relations between the United States and countries in the Middle East region which had previously seemed bad. Many American experts also support this policy, because it is considered more effective so that the United States can improve the economic crisis that occurred and focus on suppressing China in its movements in the Asia Pacific.

#### 2. Individual Sources

These individual sources look at the characteristics of someone who is influential in the policy-making process, such as the president who was in charge when the policy was made. In this Offshore Balancing policy, Obama's characteristics are very visible. How he makes decisions to deal with problems that occur and what actions to take. Of course, each president will have different ways of making decisions and policies.

In the case of the Offshore Balancing policy taken by President Barack Obama, he was influenced by his personal background which was very different from the personal background of President Bush Junior who took a more preventive policy by deploying large numbers of military troops in the Middle East region. Obama himself was born into a simple multicultural family, accustomed to living in various countries, he even lived in Indonesia. So it is very easy to adapt to the environment. He grew up to be someone who cares about the environment, is friendly, easily adapts to the environment and is

not easily rash in making decisions. So, when he served as President of the United States and was faced with a domestic crisis situation in the US plus, he was still burdened with spending large amounts of money on troops in the Middle East, he saw that the situation in the Middle East was deemed to have stabilized so he gradually began to reduce the troops stationed. Apart from being able to reduce the budget, he also saw that there was a threat from China which was starting to dominate the Asia Pacific region. Even though the Asia Pacific economy is growing very significantly, he chose to focus more on suppressing China's movements.

### 3. External Sources

External Sources or sources of foreign policy from outside are attributes of the international system or issues currently circulating in the international arena and the characteristics and behavior of states and non-state actors that influence the formation of United States policy. In our view, these External Sources are the factors that most influence the shift in the United States' Offshore Balancing policy from previously centered on the Middle East in the Bush era to Asia Pacific in the Obama presidency.

First, the military intensity in the Middle East which has been maintained until now is considered wrong because instead of reducing the effects of terrorism and hatred against the United States, it has actually increased it. Apart from that, it disrupted US relations with its European and Arab allies. This can be seen from a survey conducted by the Pew Research

Center, a research institution in the United States, that 54% of people in Turkey and 59% of people in Egypt disagree and criticize the actions taken by the US which is still maintaining Offshore Balancing in the Middle East. Second, the deployment of troops in the Middle East to secure Israel is also no longer relevant considering that Israel's military is strong enough and its strong nuclear deterrence makes it difficult for Israel to attack. In 2014, Elbit System Ltd, the largest military technology company in Israel, increased the development of defense products with the government. Elbit, receiving a quarter of state revenues, agreed to assist the Israel Defense Forces in resolving various conflicts.

Third, the crisis has been prolonged since 2008. United States global stock prices in Europe, rising interest rates, house prices, and the threat of bad credit have occurred in the United States and have not resolved until now. Rather than wasting the military budget in the Middle East, it would be better for the US to look for new sources of income, namely in the Asia Pacific region. Fourth, the Asia Pacific region with its economic growth is the goal. Obama's offshore balancing policy in the Asia Pacific region is a reaction to military advances in China and the economy of the Asia Pacific region which is controlled by China has great opportunities for profit for the United States. Gradually the US began to establish military, economic and diplomatic cooperation with countries near the Chinese border. The US already has a large number of military bases. Apart from Okinawa and Guam,

and recently Darwin, the United States has military bases in Cocos and Christmas Islands, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. What is no less important is the cooperation built by the United States with countries not far from China which are considered to be able to disrupt China's hegemony in Asia. In 2015, the US pressed for defense cooperation with South Korea which was attended by US Secretary of State, Ash Carter, and South Korean representative, Han Min Koo. Apart from that, there is also diplomatic cooperation that has been cut off but reconnected with Taiwan, which is the US's fifth largest trading partner. Fifth, the emergence of the South China Sea issue. The United States then appeared to confront China, which continues to claim maritime areas in the SCS. In this case, the US asked China to respect the 2016 arbitration court ruling in The Hague regarding Beijing's territorial claims. This is one way for the United States to open entry into the Asia Pacific region.

**c. Axiology**

Axiology is a part of philosophy that studies the theory of value which is related to the usefulness, benefits, objectives of knowledge that has been obtained, so that the benefits of a knowledge or understanding can be seen. Based on the discussion of ontology and epistemology above, we can assess that the aims and benefits of United States policy making in the Asia Pacific are based on certain interests such as security and the economy. Moreover, America is currently experiencing an economic recession due to military spending in the

Middle East. With the birth of the Chinese government's policy to modernize its military forces [11], the United States sees and considers this as an action that could threaten regional stability, considering the conflicting territorial claims experienced by several allied countries of the United States in the Asia Pacific with China. Based on this, the United States adopted a policy to make the Asia Pacific region one of its main focuses. This is in accordance with the United States' national security interests, namely maintaining good relations with its allies and safeguarding its economic interests in the region.

Furthermore, geographically, the Asia Pacific region is a region that has important value in world activities. Looking at strategic locations can influence the strategy and power policies of a country that wants to achieve its national interests. The United States sees that this region is very influential on the security of its region, because the Asia Pacific borders directly on the East Coast of the United States.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

United States foreign policy under the Barack Obama administration began to increase the role of the United States in the Asia Pacific region, especially on issues that are more multilateral in nature in establishing the United States' foreign relations with other countries in the world through foreign visits, especially with United States alliance countries in the Asia Pacific region. This was proven on November 11 2011, President Barack Obama announced that he would bring back his military power to the Asia Pacific region and make the Asia Pacific region one of the main focuses of the United States.

The United States changed the focus of its foreign policy from the Middle East to the Asia Pacific Region. In the regional



dynamics that occur, China plays an important role along with increasing its national capabilities. However, the increase in China's national capabilities is seen as a challenge to national interests, as well as security for the United States' alliance countries in the Asia Pacific region. The emergence of China as a country with a new economic and military power in the Asia

Pacific region drew a response from the United States, resulting in a pattern of action and reaction being formed from the two countries. The form of United States foreign policy in the Asia Pacific which is seen as a reaction to China's increasing military strength is bringing back its military strength, one of which is by placing 2,500 United States military personnel in Darwin, Australia.

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