

## **Defining US Southeast Asia Strategy: A Strategic Analysis of US Foreign Policy under Obama Administration**

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Abstrak

Studi ini mengkaji strategi Amerika Serikat (AS) di Asia Tenggara (Asteng). Penulis secara khusus dan empiris mengambil fokus kepentingan-kepentingan vital AS apa yang sesungguhnya terancam di kawasan Asteng, bagaimana berbagai strategi AS dan sumber daya yang dimilikinya melindungi dan memajukan kepentingan tersebut. Berbeda dengan studi lainnya, penulis mempertimbangkan apakah kebijakan poros strategis AS di Asia semata berfungsi untuk menjaga kohesivitas keamanan antarkawasan yang berada di bawah payung AS sejak Perang Dunia II. Kebijakan demikian dapat membelah persatuan ASEAN, menimbulkan ketegangan dengan Tiongkok, dan juga pada akhirnya dapat melemahkan keamanan antarkawasan. Sebagai tambahan, penulis mempertimbangkan apakah fokus baru AS di Asteng benar-benar format baru atau sekedar perubahan fokus strategi dengan substansi yang sama. Dengan menggunakan analisa studi kasus tunggal dari politik luar negeri AS di bawah Pemerintahan Presiden Obama di Asteng dari tahun 2009-2012, penulis menemukan bukti bahwa asosiasi antara fokus baru AS di Asteng dengan kepentingan nasional AS di bidang ipoleksosbudhankam yang bersifat memaksa sebagai bagian politik luar negerinya yang digunakan untuk memperbaiki keadaan dalam negerinya. Selain itu, penulis menunjukkan bahwa politik luar negeri AS di Asteng tetap dilanjutkan fokusnya pada perang melawan terorisme, menahan kebangkitan Tiongkok, dan memastikan bahwa kawasan Asteng tidak didominasi oleh entitas kekuatan yang berpotensi memusuhi AS.

**Kata kunci:** Amerika Serikat, kebijakan luar negeri, Asia Tenggara, strategis.

### **Introduction**

Southeast Asia (SEA) countries share strategic locations and access to plentiful natural resources. Furthermore, their diversity and increasing integration lie at the heart of the region's rapid and resilient economic growth. Politically, in the post 1997-1998, the region provides stability in a part of the world that is rapidly reshaping the global balance of power.

Meanwhile, The United States (US) has been the guarantor of the SEA security through a 'hub-and-spoke' security system and the forward basing of

US forces in the region since 1945. SEA continues to retain its geopolitical and economics importance to US national interests and global strategy. However, in every US administration there is an option between change and continuity on the focus of strategy in SEA. This study analyzes which variables are likely to have an effect on the US and SEA strategy.

This study examines US foreign policy in the region from 2009-2012. This study will discuss the question about what vital US interests really are at stake in the region, what is US strategy is, and what resources are used to protect and advance those interests. I will divide this study into three sections. The first section analyzes how the US security strategy contributes to its new focus in the SEA. The second section examines how economic strategy contributes to its strategic interests. The third section investigates how the US directed liberal internationalism values to shape the region.

### Theoretical Framework

The discourses on order in the SEA and the role of the US are extensive and voluminous. One of the debates focused on what is the explanation of the US hegemonic project in the region post-Cold War security order and the potential durability of any US-centered order (Ikenberry & Matsunduno, 2003). In this study I will focus on how US SEA strategy fits into this discourse. I will conduct a single-case study of US strategic pivot towards SEA under the Obama Administration from 2009-2012 which has the potential to play a role in the attenuation of regional security. In *Regions and Power: the Structure of International Security*, Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver (2003, p. 10-11) pointed out that "the regional level stands more clearly on its own as the locus of conflict and cooperation for states. Regional security dynamics will normally be a significant part of the overall constellation of security in the international system."

Kerry and Manning (2001), Misalucha, (2011) and Park (2011) pointed out that SEA remains important to US national security and continues to retain its geopolitical and economic importance to US national interests and global strategy. Yet, the US policy toward the region has been ad hoc, incoherent, reactive, and vague. Thus, in *Contemporary Southeast Asia: Regional Dynamics and National Differences*, Marc Beeson (2004) points out "the general point to emphasize about American power in the context of Southeast Asia is that it has resources available to it at the strategic, economic, and institutional levels that allow it to pursue its interests in ways that other countries cannot." Now with the 'Asia Pivot', as Ming-Te & Tai-Ling Liu (2011), Tow & Kurlantzick (2012) found that the most high profile and concrete elements of the Obama administration toward the region have come in the military realm, economic and trade relations, and sustain liberal internationalism value-making in

the region. In each of these analyses, it is clearly that there is significant evidence that the US is adopting a balancing strategy between intensifying its engagement and strategic commitment within the region. It also suggests SEA's rising importance in international order.

My research question is: "what vital interests really are at stake in SEA region today?" The study's hypotheses may include the following: (1) the economic, political, security ties between the US and ASEAN are fundamental to US economic growth and security will lead to the new focus of US SEA strategy, (2) China's emergence as a major regional power is transforming the economic, political, and security environment in SEA will lead to the new focus of US SEA strategy.

My first hypothesis pointed out by Ernest Bower and Murray Hiebert that the SEA region is an arena of considerable economic, geostrategic, and geopolitical interests that will lead to the new focus of US SEA strategy (2011: 1-3). My second hypothesis outlined by Evelyn Goh and Sheldon Simon (2008) is that the economic and political rise of China influences the nations of SEA and potentially challenges the US-centered hegemonic order in SEA will lead to the new focus of US SEA strategy.

The study's dependent variable is the US strategic policy in the region. The strategic policy covers elements of economic, politics, and security policy which relate to the role of armed forces in international affairs. It also can be seen as an approach by the government to protect and to promote national interests in the international environment (Australian Department of Defence, 1997). The strategic policy plays a decisive part in the military strategy against the adversary. It also can be seen as the broad scope of foreign policy. US foreign policy formulations are impacted heavily by political interest groups and the lobby, *corporatocracy*, institutional views of the US State Department and Pentagon Foreign Policy according to the Encyclopedia Britannica (2012) is "general objectives that guide the activities and relationships of one state in its interactions with other states. The development of foreign policy is influenced by domestic considerations, the policies or behavior of other states, or plans to advance specific geopolitical designs.

This study explores three independent variables: (1) security; (2) economy; and (3) values. Security was measured by the application of realist school theories of balancing, bandwagoning, and hedging to be applied in the US and SEA security strategy. Balancing implies the forging of countervailing strength against status quo as a hegemonic power and challenger of threatening status quo. As has been shown (Arlidge, 2011 & Goh, 2005) balancing occurs when a group of weaker states decide to oppose influence and threat posed by a stronger state or grouping of states that is unacceptable to them. The objective is to make sure that no one power is predominant in the region. Bandwagoning, by contrast, occurs when a state choose to align

itself strategically with the threatening power in order to limit the hegemonic or threatening power. As Arlidge (2011) and Goh (2005) demonstrated, in bandwagoning with the dominant state, weaker state joining together to counter larger power that threatens them.

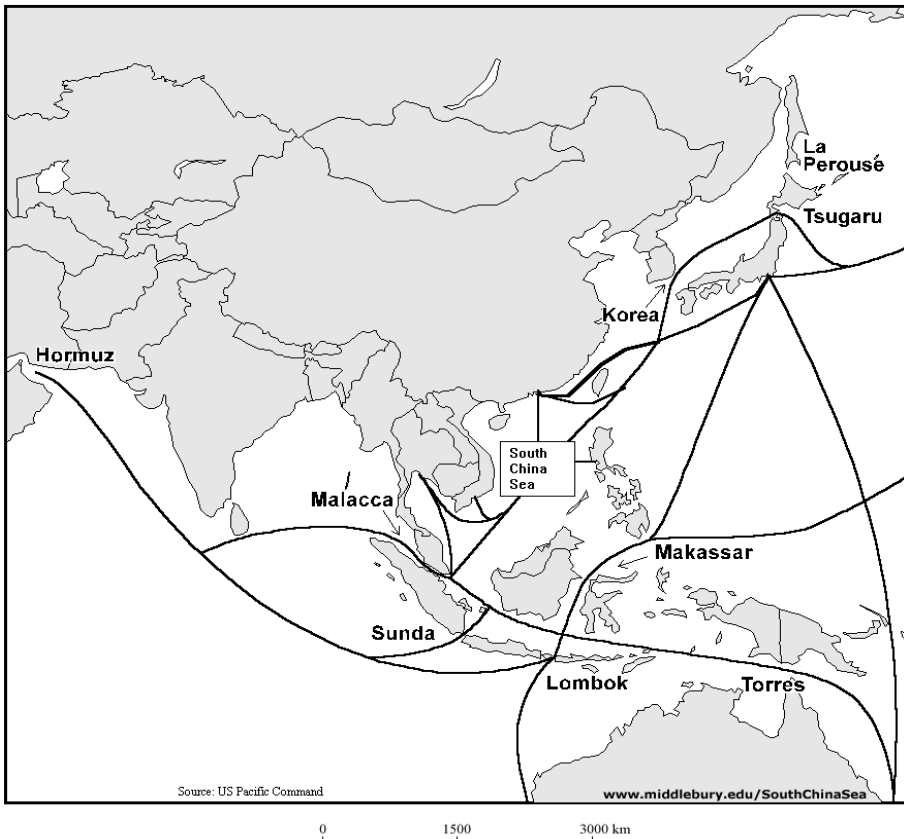
Hedging refers to taking action to ensure against undesirable outcomes, usually by cultivating a middle position that forestalls or avoids having to choose one side at the obvious expense of others. States applied hedging strategy not to antagonize major powers unless and until they directly threaten to national interests and national sovereignty. These are basically approaches to security centered on state survival in an anarchical world. Economic stakes are influenced by the growing importance of this region to the US. Security and economic stakes are influenced and shaped each other by setting 'rules of the game' in the region. This is how value stakes strategically avail and circulate US strategy in a smart power by carefully crafting security, economic, and values that is held to deserve in the region.

### **Security Stakes**

The eleven countries in the SEA are complex. The countries comprising ASEAN have varied political systems, socio-cultural systems, and rates of economic development. However when it comes to the US security stakes in the region it is relatively simple and straightforward. The security connection between US and SEA nations for almost six decades is characterized as a hub-and-spoke system. In this system, the US had perceived as the central of the security guarantor and the rest of SEA come under its proxy. However it is not simple to elaborate whether US security stakes in the region, because who counts as a security issue, who are we trying to secure, who or what are we trying to secure against, and how security to be achieved.

The first stake is to control the transportation channel at Malacca in order to break Chinese "string of pearl" strategy. This strategy is applied in the name of freedom of navigation in the geo-strategic of Malacca strait as sea-lanes for international shipment of East Asia's (EA) hydrocarbon from Middle East. It is likely that this objective is accompanied by freedom of movement on US forces from the Western Pacific to Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf.

**Map 1.** String of Pearl’ and Strategic chokepoints: straits of Malacca, Sunda, Lombok, Makassar, and sea-lanes passing the South China Sea (Spartly Islands).



Source: [http://community.middlebury.edu/~scs/maps\\_images.html](http://community.middlebury.edu/~scs/maps_images.html)

The recent trends of US security commitments in the region can be measured from those objectives and geostrategic location of the region. The regions geographic location encompasses sea-lanes connecting the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Oceans, linking north-south routes between Australia and New Zealand to the countries of EA, and its strategic relevance for international security and commerce. From the above map, we can see clearly that the hydrocarbon pathway is needed by the energy hunger of EA and the US naval movement. Annually over 60,000 maritime traders transport about 40 per cent of the world’s trade goods and 80 per cent of EA’s oil through Malacca strait (Sotrey, 2008: 102-103). From the Strait of Hormuz the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC) must pass the Malacca strait or if there is any crisis must navigate to Sunda, Lombok, or Makassar straits. It is

reasonable to say that maintaining freedom of navigation of these strategic waterways is everybody's concern and objective. However, from the US military perspective, these sea-lanes are critically important.

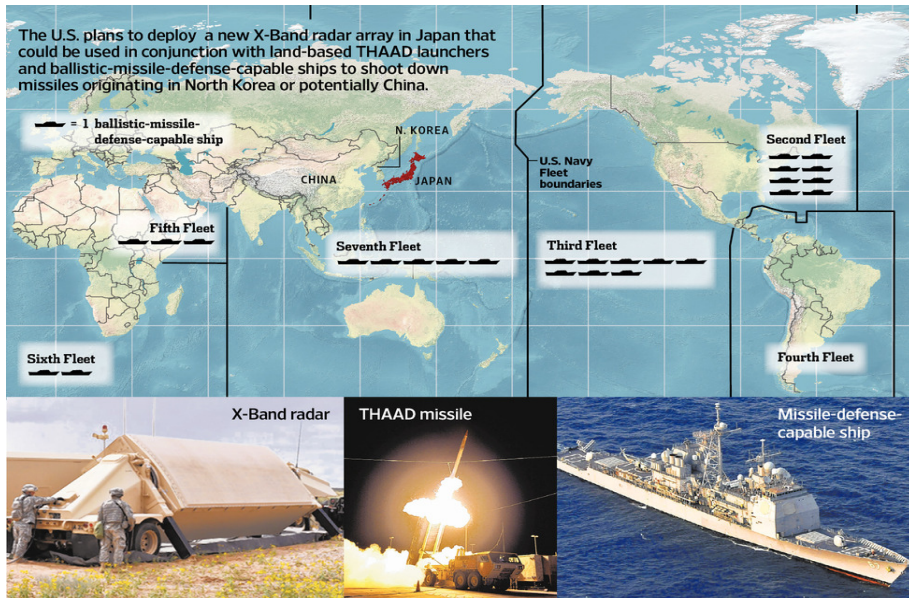
According to Kuppuswamy (2004), Malacca strait is "situated between the coastline of Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore to the East and the Indonesian island of Sumatra to the West, extends 900 km from its widest point (about 350 km between Northern Sumatra and Thailand) to its narrowest (less than 3 km wide between southern Sumatra and Singapore). At its shallowest, it has reported that the depth is just 25 meters. Any attempt conducted by a hostile power to control or interdict these sea-lanes can raise the stakes the battle of power in the name of freedom of navigation and protecting each national interest. The security implications will be too heavy if hostile power and disruption take place on it. Because of these security implications, the US is eager to internationalize the Malacca strait. This is done by bilateral approaches towards the littoral states of Malacca – among which are Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore – to prevent conventional and non-conventional threats.

The second stake is to advance military reinforcements and deployments in the region. To achieve a stable region in SEA, US thinks that it is better to have military capabilities, its presence, and its proxy. It is because if there is any potential threat of China as a rising regional power or disruption from SEA countries, it will threaten US economy and security in a variety of ways.

The US's pivotal role in the region highlights the importance of military ties with its traditional allies in the region, namely the Philippines, Thailand, and Singapore, and announced it as strategy of rebalancing. This strategy of rebalancing is basically a shift of US military focus in the world from the realm of frustration in Afghanistan and Iraq to prospective SEA. That is why the US needs to secure SEA sea-lanes. The US is seeking to increase its military presence by shifting 60 per cent of its navy ship to the Asia-Pacific (Porth, 2007). The necessity to rebalance toward SEA will emphasize in existing traditional alliances, searching non-traditional alliances, secure strategic partnership, selling arms sales, and reinforcement of US military deployment in the region.

The shift of American military could place SEA countries in a dilemma because SEA is eager to have Chinese money under the US security umbrella. The US tries to attract its non-traditional alliances in the region in order to help them feel secure with his growing military posture capabilities in Asia and not to bandwagon with China. The US does not want any rival within the region as the guarantor of peace and stability because of its vested interests. The US plans to deploy new missile defense can be seen from this context. The US anti-missile defense or powerful early warning radar known as X-band in Japan in 2006, could be placed in SEA in the near future.

Map 2. US Plans New Asia Missile Defense



Photos: Raytheon, Associated Press (2)

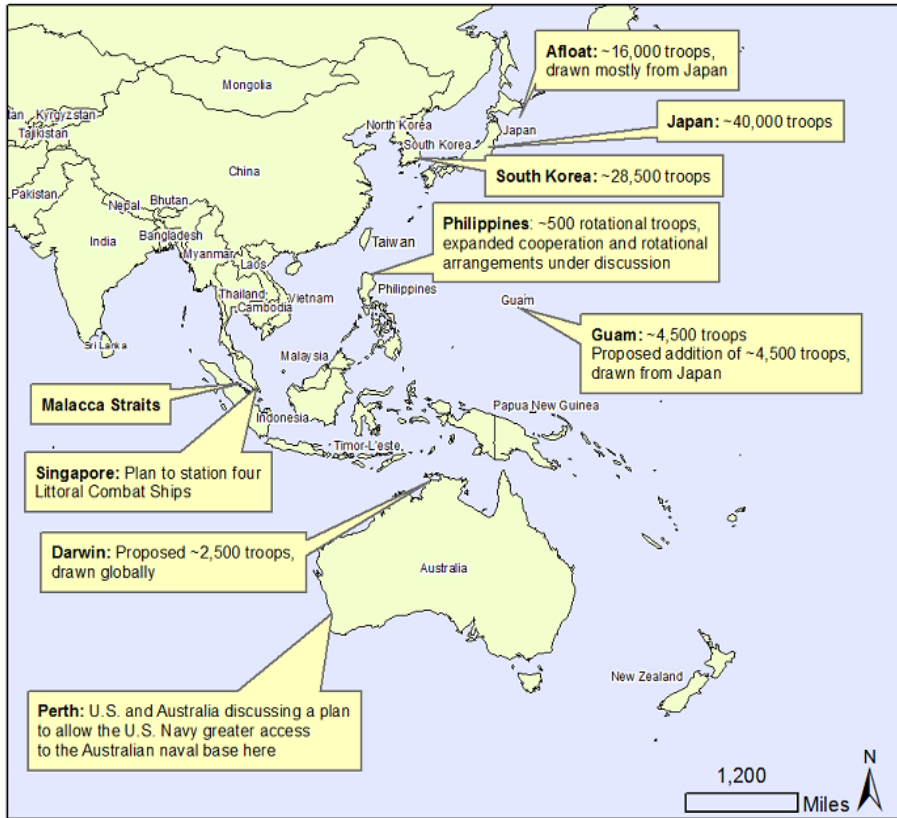
The Wall Street Journal

Source: Adam Entous & Julian Barnes (2012, August 23). *U.S. Plans New Asia Missile Defenses*. Retrieved September 16, 2012, from The Wall Street Journal: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10000872396390444812704577605591629039400.html#project%3DASIAMISSILE0823%26articleTabs%3Darticle>.

As we can see on the map above, I think it is a tactical move from the US to put strategic weapon in Japan, as a buffer state, where they can intercept missiles from China or North Korea. This also can be seen as a kind of shrewd preparation if there is any crisis in the region. Australia or SEA certainly have a strategic location to launch an attack or as a logistical station if war is broke out.

If we see from a macro analysis, it is likely that the US would militarily deter China. It is not only about defining hierarchy or hegemony but it is about how to prolong assertiveness in the US-centered hegemonic order in the region, due to its relative decline of the US power perceived by others. By implication, it will have an impact, from micro analysis, on whether SEA countries pursue security strategy of balancing, hedging, bandwagoning, or positioning neutrality to deal with the rise of China. The US tries to re-engage with SEA and send a 'warning signal' to China. In other words, it is a soft power move to pressure SEA countries and smart power move to threaten China.

**Map 3.** Selected 92,000 US troops deployments and plans



Source: Mark Manyin, et al. (2012). *Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama Administration's "Rebalancing" Towards Asia*. Washington: Congressional Research Service, p. 3.

I argue that this move is threatening the region, because it is creating an insecure mentality in the region and a shared collective security dilemma in the region. Griffiths, O'Callaghan, and Roach (2008: 295) posited that security competition will lead super power, major powers, middle powers, and little powers in the region to ensure order and protection in an anarchical international system. If we examine the current state of the US alliances, partnership, and security cooperation, there are only three countries that support US military presence in the region and among them are the Philippines, Thailand, and Singapore. The Philippines has an alliance treaty with US in 1947, joint military exercises, and 142 US soldiers have stationed in the Philippines. Thailand has an alliance treaty with US in 1955, joint military exercises, contributed troops and support for US military operations in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Thailand has 142 of US soldiers stationed in the country. Singapore contributed troops



and supported US military operations in Afghanistan, participant in anti-piracy operations in Malacca Strait, joint military exercises, and the country has 163 of US soldiers stationed (Dormandy, 2012). Other countries among which conduct military exercises with the US military in the region include Malaysia and Cambodia, but it has a small US military presence. Vietnam has a statement of intent on military medical cooperation with US, signed in August 2011. Malaysia has allied with Australia, while Australia has allied with the US. Malaysia allows Australia to use their airbase station at Butterworth (White, 2012). Meanwhile, Indonesia has carried out 140 joint military exercises with the US in 2011. US has financed four reconnaissance radars along the Makassar Strait, and provided 19 patrol boats, and tactical communication in Jakarta in addition to the radar installations along the northern Sumatra coast (Yudhoyono, 2012 & Dormandy, 2012).

Based on the above map, we can see that there are 92,000 troops deployed and plans supported by the US in the strategic pivot toward Asia. US military placements all over the world number is about 255,000 troops. This strategy is more than re-balancing but it is crowding Asia-Pacific with US troops to be stationed.<sup>1</sup> I argue this can destabilize the region and it can result a potential clash deduced from keen observation in six contemporaries of the US military active in the region.

First, the US were increasing military training to ASEAN countries. From the year 2000, the US has staged a number of joint military Cobra Gold exercises and drills with the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia (Kerry & Manning, 2011). The US applies the 'influence squadron' concept by dispatching small groups of lower capability ships to far-flung locations across the region, the US Navy can partner with more nations in maritime SEA than would be possible if its ships operate as part of a large task force (Denmark & Kliman, 2011). The US Navy will deploy its first littoral combat ship (LCS) in Singapore, beginning from the second quarter of 2013. Second, in the midst of SCS tension, in June 2012, the Philippines has allowed American troops, warships, and aircraft once again use their former naval and air facilities in Subic, Zambales, and in Clark field in Pampanga after twenty years being inactive (Laude, 2012).

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1 This is a conservative figure. The US military has bases in 70 countries with 255,065 military personnel deployed worldwide. The US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta said that the US would move its Navy fleet and military personnel by 60% into the Asia-Pacific region. It means there will be 153,039 military personnel will come to the region. See Jules Dufour. (2007, July 1). *The Worldwide Network of US Military Bases. The Global Deployment of US Military Personnel*. Retrieved July 8, 2012, from Global Research: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-worldwide-network-of-us-military-bases/>; David Alexander. (2012, February 6). *Panetta: Majority of US Warship moving to Asia. Defense secretary provides first details of new strategy*. Retrieved July 9, 2012, from MSNBC: [http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/47655768/ns/world\\_news-asia\\_pacific/t/panetta-majority-us-warships-moving-asia/#.UHNaiK47qt8](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/47655768/ns/world_news-asia_pacific/t/panetta-majority-us-warships-moving-asia/#.UHNaiK47qt8).

Third, the US marine deployment and airbase in Darwin in 2012 will be upgraded for increasing US nuclear-armed warships and aircraft. Fourth, it is accompanied by plans for surveillance drone aircraft to operate from Cocos Islands. Fifth, in 2011, the volume of US overseas arms sales hit a record high of \$66.3 billion, the lion's share coming from the Asia-Pacific region (US Department of Defense, 2012). Sixth, the US has sought to return to U-tapao Air Base in the Thai eastern seaboard province or Kampong Som in Cambodia as part of its military buildup in the region.

The US security objectives for military deployments, strategic missile shield plan, and being targeted to China, are to assure the region and to bandwagon with the US. This implies that the blockade of EA's vital sea passages through SEA region could cut off its access to oil and other natural resources and strangle its economy. In other words, the shift of US military could affect the peace and stability in the region if it tries to play the role of leadership adversary with China. Any wrong signals over SEA sea-lanes continued to South China Sea (SCS) will cause unrest in the region.

These developments likely are part of a broader US strategy of forging alliances and effective bases throughout the region aimed at surrounding China. The US repeatedly has announced that its national interest in the region to maintain peace and stability, respect for international law, freedom of navigation, and unimpeded lawful commerce in the SCS. However, US reaction to the territorial dispute in the SCS is quite important. The US announced that they do not take a position on competing territorial claims but they attempt to be on the game and elevate the issue as international affairs. The idea of more formal code of conduct proposed by the US is criticized by the Chinese media who sees America's "role as a sneaky trouble maker sitting behind some nations in the region and pulling strings (Xinhua, 2012).

The third stake is to surround China. In the Cold War, the US government saw the containment of communism as a global task. Now this mentality is coming back. From the perspective of regional security complex (Buzan and Waever, 2003) after the Cold War in SEA, "conflict came in bipolarized form, thus attracted a relatively clear pattern of superpower intervention." SEA became so heavily penetrated by the US and Chinese rivalry that its essential structure largely followed Cold War alignments. Moreover, any stability inside the SEA countries has serious spill-over consequence in the region because of this reason. This is also because the status quo of the US super power and the rising regional power of China that has penetrated the domestic affairs of SEA countries and it heavily affected and played a role in regional bipolarization of conflict. However, this region tied together as united ASEAN, partly because of that rivalry in the Cold War and its ambiguous role of ASEAN played so aptly for 'rowing between two rocks.' It is why SEA was neither fully autonomous nor subordinated.

After the Cold War, the situation borne some resemblance to Cold War mechanisms but in more dramatic, subtle, and strategic ways. The US attempted to divide-and-rule of ASEAN unity in order to weaken China’s political, economic and security influences in the region. China ‘peaceful rice’ seen by the US as potential challenger for the US ‘return to Asia’ policy, at first in business and later in remaking the order. The US engagement policy seeks to develop closer political and economic ties with SEA countries and draw them into US’s sphere of influence. This can be seen from the US initiative to urge regional bloc ASEAN to form an united front on territorial dispute in the SCS.

In the new US strategic review (January 2012), it is clear that the US has anticipated this at the very beginning. The US perceived challenge posed by the rising China at very heart of America’s new defense strategy. The document carefully said that China is not destined to be an adversary. But it makes it clear the US is, nevertheless, about to retool its military to deter China, and if necessary, to confront it (US DoD, 2012). It is reasonable to say that the fundamental of the US national security policy *vis-à-vis* China in SEA is to check the latter increase with the former decline in the region. What is the indicator?

I will look into details in economic stakes analysis but it is suffice to say that China’s trade with ASEAN surpasses trade between the US and ASEAN since 2007. I would like to elaborate my argument that the US contemporary strategy divide-and-rule since the Obama Administration has conducted a bilateral approach rather than regional approach. This can be seen from eighteenth visit of the US President and Secretary of State from 2009-2012.

<b>Barrack Obama’s Trip through the SEA region 2009-2012</b>		
<b>2009</b>		
<b>Date(s)</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Objectives</b>
November 14	Singapore	The trip was the second stop on a four-nation tour of Asia. Obama was attending APEC Singapore 2009 summit. He had bilateral talks with Singapore’s PM and Indonesia’s President.
<b>2010</b>		
<b>Date(s)</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Objectives</b>
November 9-10	Indonesia	President Obama’s state visit to Jakarta, as part of a four-country tour of Asia. He signed the Comprehensive Partnership Agreement between the two countries.

2011		
Date(s)	Country	Objectives
November 17-19	Cambodia, Myanmar, & Indonesia	<p>President Obama second visit to Indonesia. He attended the annually ASEAN Summit and the sixth East Asia Summit (EAS) in Bali. He had bilateral meetings with PM of Thailand, President of the Philippines, and President of Indonesia.</p> <p>Before that, President Obama went to Myanmar for six-hour trip to balance U.S praise for the government's progress in shaking off military rule with pressure to complete the process of democratic reform</p> <p>President Obama arrived in Cambodia to criticize the country's strongman leader on the issue of human rights during a tense meeting.</p>
Hillary Clinton's trip through the SEA region 2009-2012		
2009		
Date(s)	Country	Objectives
February 18	Indonesia	<p>Hillary Clinton made her first trip as a Secretary of State to Asia. Indonesia is her second destination. US pledged stronger ties with Jakarta.</p> <p>She reiterated that Islam, democracy, and modernity can thrive together.</p> <p>She discussed building ties on issues such as climate change, trade, security, and counter-terrorism.</p>

2010		
Date(s)	Country	Objectives
July 22-23	Vietnam	Hillary was in Vietnam to attend the 27-nation of ASEAN regional forum. She discussed military cooperation and forging better ties, pushed in part by mutual concerns over SCS issue, as well as desire to expand trade and investment.
October 29-30	Vietnam	The second visit of Hillary Clinton was just about three months. Hillary attended the EAS and hosted meeting with her counterparts in the Lower Mekong initiative (LMI).  She also highlighted economic partnerships with Vietnam, speaking for human rights and religious freedom, and building multilateral cooperation with Asia.
October 30-31	Cambodia	She commits that the US will deepen partnership with Cambodia and aim to help its social and economic development, including the debt issue.
November 1-2	Malaysia	She discussed bilateral relationships (strategic cooperation), the role that Malaysia is playing in the Trans Pacific Partnership, and a new free trade agreement that will enhance market access.  She also raised issues for the Malaysian government to support Afghanistan and the people there with training and medical service.

2011		
Date(s)	Country	Objectives
November 30 – December 2	Myanmar	Hillary Clinton was the first secretary state to visit Myanmar since John Foster Dulles in 1955.  The aim of the trip was to test what the true intentions of Myanmar regimes and whether there was any commitment to both economic and political reform. US wanted to help Myanmar in the democratization process.
November 15-16	Philippines	Hillary came to commemorate 60 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of the US-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty. She also participated in a signing ceremony to launch the implementation phase of Partnership for Growth with the Philippines.
November 16	Thailand	Hillary underscored US's strong alliance with Thailand. She also discussed shared interests and regional issues in advance of the EAS.
November 17-19	Indonesia	She attended EAS and the US ASEAN Leaders Meeting.
2012		
Date(s)	Country	Objectives
July 10-11	Vietnam	Hillary promoted US investment and raising human rights concern.
July 11	Laos	This groundbreaking visit to Laos marked the first US Secretary of State in 57 years. Hillary discussed a variety of bilateral issues, including the LMI and ASEAN integration efforts

July 11-13	Cambodia	<p>Hillary chaired and attended ministerial events and participated in bilateral meetings with Cambodian officials. Region conferences included ARF, the EAS Summit Foreign Ministries Meeting, and the US-ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference. She acted as a co-chair in the LMI Ministerial.</p> <p>Clinton led US business representatives to Cambodia for ASEAN at the “Commitment to Connectivity-US ASEAN Business Forum” and delivered a keynote address on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment.</p>
September 3	Indonesia	<p>Hillary discussed various regional issues with senior officials of Indonesia, such as the SCS dispute. Clinton held talks with Indonesian Foreign Affairs Minister Marty Natalegawa on bilateral and global issues.</p> <p>Hillary Clinton visited the ASEAN Secretariat, emphasizing the US’ commitment to see ASEAN continuing its growth as a vibrant, open region that is committed to regional and global peace and prosperity.</p>
September 6	East Timor	<p>Hillary reemphasized US support for East Timor democratization and economic development.</p>
September 7	Brunei	<p>Hillary focused on the discussion of Brunei’s chairmanship of the ASEAN regional bloc in 2013.</p>

Sources: Collected from various sources in Jakarta Post, Xinhua, Global Times, and Guardian.

What assumptions can be made from above data? Apart from a divide-and-rule strategy and SEA's strategic sea lanes of communication there are at least eight objectives from above visits. One for sure is the reaffirmation of a US 'pivotal' role in the SEA. Hillary Clinton visited all eleven countries of SEA in three years. There is no doubt that the center of economic gravity now shifted to Asia. SEA has a strategic and vital role to play concerning this trend. The US wants to revive its economic weight and brake China's in the region. The US pays more attention to Indonesia because it has an important role to play in the region as largest Muslim population in the world. It can be seen also as a sign of a new US policy towards the Muslim world and its engagement with SEA countries in general. Second, it is a try-out for the US to critically think what choices be made in crafting its strategy for the SEA in the midst of the rising China. In my view, there are only three courses, whether the US hinges to recapitalize its forces in the region, encourage its allies to take on larger security responsibilities or limit its commitments.

Third, the US is encouraging the rise of SEA's low and middle powers to hedging together as a unit against China. As for that case, ASEAN countries are in the dilemma of presenting themselves, not to leaning toward the US or China. ASEAN countries now are on the brink of this division if they cannot internally find solutions to break the 'battle' of regional leadership between the US and China. The US wants to tie the discourse to ASEAN's elites and its decision-making that underlines the importance of American power in assuring the small countries of ASEAN to protect their interests in the realm of China's rise. Fourth, encircling China is a major challenge for US-centered hegemonic order in the region. The US 'pivot' to Asia-Pacific envisages US leadership in shaping regionalism and its future now is being contested by China.

Fifth, it also raises the importance of the Eastern flank of Indonesia in geo-strategic importance. Eighty per cent of China's oil imports still pass through the Malacca strait and this is why it is a vital choke-point. However, it seems the US has a contingency plan in the Eastern part of Indonesia when the crisis erupted. Sixth, the US tries to assure SEA countries not to bandwagon with China. The US does not want any rival within the region as the guarantor of peace and stability, because it threatens its vested interest in the region.

Seventh, at the moment US conduct the primacy of military power rhetoric to demand security commitment of SEA countries (such as defeat global terrorism) and to have greater access to SEA markets. In other words, the use of military power is to maintain its dominance of SEA resources and to gain profit against China. Eight, the US wants to reaffirm its presence and influence in the region, or at least to neutralize China in order to sustain the status quo. China's desire to reduce US influence is an uneasy fact for the US.



The 'battle' of making order in Asia-Pacific rests on how the US continues and consolidates its current patterns of the US-hegemonic order.

In my opinion, the key element concerning to the order in SEA is balancing of power. The concept of balancing of power used in SEA tends toward the common confusion between the power structure and policies or behavior designed to influence the structural outcome.<sup>2</sup> The US strategic engagement in SEA is to maintain US presence based on treaty alliances. In SEA, there are only three countries producing this capability, such as Thailand (Manila Pact of the former SEATO in February 19, 1954 and designated as major Non-NATO ally since December 2003), the Philippines (with Mutual Defense Treaty in August 30, 1951 and major non-NATO ally since October 6, 2003), and Singapore (Strategic Framework Agreement July 1, 2005) in a less rigid way (Clinton, 2010).

The US objective is not just to sustain the cooperation but also it aims to engage further so that the cooperation remain effective in a changing world. For these three countries, US engagement is viewed as essential action to maintain regional stability and it needs to continue to prosper this complicated strategic environment. However, Indonesia and Malaysia relations with US were not so close comparing to those three countries. Indonesia is being targeted as a crucial and potential key ally for the US during the Obama Administration since the signing of a bilateral strategic comprehensive partnership in 2010. As for CMLV (Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam) countries, the US is competing hard with China to influence these countries that located in China's backyard. Based on these analyses, the US security strategies in the region are inextricable with the US economic interests. In the following section, I will analyze what the US economic stakes in the region.

### **Economic Stakes**

Washington and Beijing as the world's two biggest economies compete in the Asia's regional economy. In the article of *Foreign Policy*, Hillary Clinton stated that "harnessing Asia's growth and dynamism is central to American economic and strategic interests and a key priority for President Obama. Clinton (2011) posited that open markets in Asia provide the US with unprecedented opportunities for investment, trade, and access to cutting-edge technology. Our economic recovery at home will depend on exports and the ability of American firms to tap into the vast and growing consumer base of Asia."<sup>3</sup>

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2 Wiliam Tow & Amitav Acharya. (2007, December). *Obstinate or obsolete? The US alliance structure in the Asia-Pacific*. Retrieved October 10, 2012, from ANU: [http://ips.cap.anu.edu.au/ir/pubs/work\\_papers/07-4.pdf](http://ips.cap.anu.edu.au/ir/pubs/work_papers/07-4.pdf), pp. 6-37.

3 Hillary Clinton. (2011, November). *America's Pacific Century*. Retrieved September 18, 2012, from *Foreign Policy*: [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas\\_pacific\\_century?page=full](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas_pacific_century?page=full).

The SEA region contains eleven independent countries: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam. All of these, with the exception of Timor-Leste, joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The objectives of ASEAN are to promote regional economic growth, political stability, social progress, and cultural developments in the SEA region. The characteristic of ASEAN is non-interference, respect sovereignty, based on a mutualistic symbiosis relationship, and does not intend to make defense or military alliances and common foreign policy. The SE region then is open to any non-hostile country that wants to cooperate peacefully.

The ASEAN region covers an area of 4.46 million square kilometers, with a population of approximately 598 million people (about 8.8% of the world population). In 2011, its combined nominal GDP had grown to \$1.8 trillion; despite this significant disparities still prevail across the region (ASEAN, 2011). Today, according to Nehru (2011), SEA is characterized by high economic growth in most countries and closer regional integration. SEA's ten countries have combined GDP of \$1.9 trillion (bigger than India), a population of almost 600 million people (nearly twice that of the U.S.), and an average per-capita income \$3.0925 (near that of China). Over the last decade, the countries have averaged a growth rate of more than 5 percent per year (Budiman, 2008). Rasyid (2008) posited that if SEA were one country, it would be the world's ninth largest economy. It would also be the most trade-dependent, with a trade-to-GDP ratio in excess of 150 percent, and one of the world's consistently good performers.

In the midst of US economies downturn, economic opportunities in SEA are too good to be left out. There are at least three objectives on US economic strategies in the region. First, renew domestic economic vigor. The IMF has announced that China will surpass the US economically in real terms in 2016. The report brings new light to the US economic debates surrounding American debts, budget, government spending, investment, and the crisis of the US dollar. The report uses purchasing power and other factors to gauge economic growth. It measured what people earn and spend in real terms as opposed to measuring exchange and currency rates (Weisbrot 2011 & RT 2012). This has shocked many who did not realize China was so close to surpassing the US.

According to the latest US Treasury's figures, the total outstanding U.S. public debt hit \$16 trillion, an increase of more than 5 trillion dollars compared to the level when Obama took office in 2009. The US has come too close to the legislative limit of the debt, which was set at a level slightly below \$16.4 trillion. According to Vasspard (2012) "to date, the budget deficit in the U.S. is \$ 1.2 trillion. It is clear that there is no money in the treasury to solve the problem and it is impossible to pay the huge debt of many years in one

fell swoop. One has to understand: reducing the deficit now means stopping all movement within the economy. For the global market, which can hardly move right now, it will be a stab in the back.”

ASEAN with a considerable population is a large market for American goods and services as well as an increasingly important US investments destination and sources of imports. SEA is a region likely to play a critical role in determining the future of Asia and whether the US can sustain itself as an Asia-Pacific power. The significance of the SEA for US interest is reflected by the trade amounts almost \$200 billion annually, and US cumulative investment in the region is valued over \$100 billion in 2011 (Mitchell & Harding, 2011, p. VI). Therefore, any form of invigorating economic relationship is welcomed by the US. In SEA, China’s increasing economic clout and political influence has pushed US to the side and the role of leading economic player is taken over by China (Rachmianto, 2011).

When we connect the security stakes with economic stakes, as Liming (2012), we found an interesting link that “the volume of U.S. overseas arms sales hit a record high of \$66.3 billion, the lion’s share coming from the Asia-Pacific region.” This is why US conducts joint military exercises and drills with SEA countries and its traditional allies in Northeast Asia such as Japan and South Korea.

A second goal is to become largest trading partner in the region. This strategy objective is to prevent the decline of US total trade with SEA and pave the way for US investment flooding into the region. The table below explains more about it.

**Table 2.** ASEAN with Selected Trade Partners: Total Trade (in US\$ million and percent share) from 2003-2010

Country	2003 (%)	2008 (%)	2009 (%)	2010 (%)
Intra-ASEAN	206,732 (25.1)	470,112 (24.8)	376,1172 (24.5)	519,805 (25.4)
China	59,637 (7.2)	196,884 (10.4)	178,190 (11.6)	232,013 (11.3)
EU-27	102,767 (12.3)	101,683 (11.0)	208,291 (11.2)	208,585 (10.2)
Japan	113,401 (13.8)	214,400 (11.3)	160,893 (10.5)	206,637 (10.1)
USA	117,886 (14.3)	186,243 (9.8)	149,582 (9.7)	186,685 (9.1)

Source: Data processed from ASEAN. (2012). *ASEAN Community in Figures*. (Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat), p. 14-15.

From the table above we can infer that China, EU-27 and the US continued to be ASEAN's major trade partners. The US remained the fifth largest goods trading partner of the ASEAN. Trade values between the US and ASEAN amounted \$186 billion in 2010. This put the US in fifth place or 9.1% share in total trade with ASEAN. In addition to increasing intra-ASEAN integration, China was the fastest growing trade partner, an upsurge of more than ten-fold with ASEAN since the Asian financial crisis in 1998. Intra-ASEAN trade comprised one-fourth of ASEAN's total trade. China, EU-27, Japan, and the US continued to be the four major trade partners of the ASEAN. However, the combined share of EU-27, Japan, and US to ASEAN's total trade has dwindled from 2003-2010.

ASEAN is also a major destination for American foreign investments, as measured by Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) position as we can see from the table below. From the table below, EU-27, intra-ASEAN and Japan remained to be the top providers of ASEAN FDI inflows for 2010. EU-27 contributed 22.4%, followed by intra-ASEAN (16%), and Japan (11%). The US remained as the third largest investor in ASEAN in front of China by almost triple. Furthermore, according to the latest figures, in 2011 trade between US and ASEAN totaled \$194 billion while China's trade value with ASEAN amounted to \$292.78 billion. US FDI stock in ASEAN countries amounted to \$6.1 billion in 2011 while China's investment in ASEAN totaled \$4.38 billion in 2010.<sup>4</sup> China is still the biggest trading partner for ASEAN, followed by EU, Japan, and the US. These figures have confronted SEA countries with an acute dilemma. It has historically a closed economic, strategic, and military ties with the US yet it is increasingly reliant on China as a trading partner. China has definitely realized that it depends heavily on its trade, particularly the trade with its backyard neighbors in SEA to secure its imports of energy resources and other raw material that passed through SEA countries.

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4 ASEAN. (2012, June). *Overview of ASEAN-US Dialogue Relations*. Retrieved September 12, 2012, from Association of Southeast Asian Nations: <http://www.aseansec.org/23222.htm>; Xinhua. (2011, November 17). *China-ASEAN 2011 trade to hit record high*. Retrieved September 14, 2012, from Xinhua: [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/bizchina/2011-11/17/content\\_14113326.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/bizchina/2011-11/17/content_14113326.htm).

**Table 3.** ASEAN: FDI inflow, by source country (in US\$ million) from 2003-2010 and % share from 2003-2010

Country	2003	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	% Share
EU-27	6,866	13,387	18,611	7,010	9,132	17,066	22.4
Intra-ASEAN	2,712	7,876	9,626	9,449	5,271	1,765	16.1
US	1,363	3,041	8,340	3,518	4,087	8,578	11.3
Japan	3,903	10,413	8,844	4,129	3,763	8,386	11.0
China	201	1,035	1,741	1,874	4,158	2,861	3.8

Source: ASEAN. (2012: 38). *ASEAN Community in Figures*. (Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat).

The other side of coin, I think it is reasonable to say that the US wants to get more share in economic opportunities in SEA and if it possible to weaken China and ASEAN economic relations. Actually, since 2007 the total trade between China and ASEAN has surpassed total trade between US and ASEAN.<sup>5</sup> This is why the US wants to catch-up with economic opportunities because it already lags behind in economic regional initiatives behind China such as ASEAN-China Free Trade Are (ACTFA) and ASEAN +3 cooperative frameworks. China's initiative for an FTA with ASEAN formed the largest FTA, comprising 1.9 billion consumers and \$4.3 trillion in trade (come into effect in 2010).

With this profit, China has increased its military spending by 170% in real terms since 2002. The US remains by far the biggest military spender, with the defense budget of \$711 billion in 2011. It is followed by China, which spent an estimated \$143 billion on its armed forces in 2011 (Rogers, 2012). The US determines to reestablish the economic supremacy which cannot be challenged by China or by other combination of economic powers. The US wants to break any block of regional cooperation that is under Chinese influence and transform it to another kind of regional cooperation which is called "multilateral regionalism."

The third goal is to craft economic "multilateral regionalism" to mitigate Chinese economic preponderance in the region. In general, it is about how to advance and promote US national interest in trade, credit, and natural resources one step ahead of China. The US lags behind China in projects on of its economic statecraft in the region. The US has started to realize that the table is difficult to turn and it is more reasonable for the US to advocate a new

<sup>5</sup> ASEAN. (2011, December 16). *Inaugural China-ASEAN Beijing Economic Forum (CABEF) looks forward to its second edition in 2012, as organisers and participants affirmed the importance of bilateral dynamics*. Retrieved 15 September, 2012, from Association of Southeast Asian Nations: <http://www.aseansec.org/26758.htm>.

regionalism partnership to counter Chinese economic advancements in the region. What is the form of this “multilateral regionalism?”

The form of multilateral regionalism is Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP). The objective is to reach SEA countries such as Brunei, Singapore, Vietnam, and Malaysia. According to Hung Ming-Te and Tony Tai-Ting Liu (2011, p. 108), the TPP is “basically follows Washington’s long term conception for regionalization in Asia that is centered on APEC countries towards trade liberalization in the region. Washington’s TPP proposal brings in yet another alternative to the multiple developments towards regionalization in Asia, which is currently centered on ASEAN +3 with China as the dominant player.”

This is the counter-economic strategy from the ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement (ACTFA), proposed China-oriented ASEAN +3 trade agreements or the broader Comprehensive Economic Partnership for East Asia. This new economic cooperation initiative likely represents a pan-Asian movement to resist American imposition of liberal capitalist reforms and to restore Asia’s developmental vision. ACTFA itself was signed in 2002 and establishing the FTA in order to trade goods for the original six ASEAN countries in 2010 and for newer members by 2015 (Sutter, 2010, p. 217).

In my opinion, this happened likely because the US wants to be a model of regional architecture building in the region. The US tries to pave the way in economic regional architecture within ASEAN and their economic strategy in the region. The national security strategy is most likely aimed at economic regionalism connecting ASEAN with APEC and other regional institutions in the Asia-Pacific region (Clinton, 2010). By effect, it will create systemic concerns of a ‘noodle-bowl’ effect, which is the overlapping and crisscrossing of FTAs in the Asia-Pacific region.

Following the Asian financial crisis, a variety of Asian regional multilateral groupings centered on ASEAN and its EA partners were formed and advanced significantly. China’s stature and influence in these groups and among ASEAN states grew rapidly and burgeoning intra-Asian trade and investment networks involving China in a central role, attentive, and innovative of Chinese diplomacy (Sutter, 2009). This is known as the Beijing Consensus in opposition of Washington Consensus.

What is the impact of this so-called ‘Beijing Consensus’ for SEA? It is basically the consciousness of Asian in general, and SEA in particular (especially shown by the Prime Minister of Malaysia Mahathir Mohammad) that the ability of print currency gives the US immense power. Why this is so importance?

It is because, “Chinese currency now has the potential to be a major currency of the global economy due to China’s huge international reserves

of as much \$3 trillion" (*The Nation*, 2012). According to John Perkins (2004, p. 212), it means that "US can continue to make loans that will never be repaid, and by that continues accumulate huge debts. As long as the world accepts the dollar as its standard currency, this excessive debt does not pose a serious obstacle to the corporatocracy. However, if another currency should come along to replace the dollar, and if some of the US's creditors (Japan or China, for example) should decide to call their debts, the situation would change drastically. The US would suddenly find itself in a most precarious situation." The US does not want that to happen and it is imperative to setting the values in the region.

### **Value Stakes**

The first goal is to promote deeper liberal internationalism. According to Griffiths, O'Callaghan, & Roach (2008), liberal internationalism is "essentially a project to transform international relations so that they conform to models of peace, freedom, and prosperity allegedly enjoyed within constitutional liberal democracies such as the US". Keohane (2002) posited that there are three strands of liberal internationalism, which are commercial liberalism operating at the transnational level, republican liberalism directed at the relationship between states and their citizens, and regulatory or institutional liberalism operates at the level of the international political structure. The US realized that it is important to build international regimes to expect desirable outcomes and behavior of ASEAN countries via embedded institution and bilateral ties. This is important task to illuminate economic and power relationship between states. Regimes according to Stephen Krasner (1982) can be defined "as sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations." By setting out the regimes, the US molds the international structure and system governed in the region by the infusion of principles, norms, rules, and decision making-procedures as sets of governing arrangements. This will create asymmetrical relationship and the power-maximizing of US interests in the region.

With a US proactive policy towards the region, there is a basic value-stake strategy from the US to the SEA countries to promote democratic development of the region, to invigorate engagement with its non-traditional allies, and to enhance its engagement with its traditional allies, and to address transnational threats in the region. In order to achieve those value-stake objectives, the US has to shape regimes in SEA to secure desired outcomes based on expected behavior. This is why values are so important because it is part of utilization of regimes in the practice and inextricably linked with expected behavior. Assuring these regimes will lead to power stability and interest security in the region.

Scholars of varying ideological persuasions agree that a strong state/political economy are no longer viable in SEA, as the pressures of globalization continue to sweep the region shaking economies, and liberal economic rules are more rigorously enforced by international institutions like the IMF and WTO (Felker, 2004: 70). It seems that the advent of financial globalization under the auspices of undisguised American hegemony confronts the region with a stark choice: yield fully to the imperatives of global markets and to embrace economic as well as political liberalization, or else risk marginalization and decline.

During the Asian Financial Crisis, the US insisted on pressing neoliberal reforms through the conditions attached to IMF bailout packages. As of today, America has restored geostrategic priorities to prominence in its Asian agenda, at the expense of hopes for liberal political and economic change. Against the backdrop, of its regional rivalry with China and its pivot toward Asia, Obama Administration has sought greater security cooperation in the region and signalled its willingness to overlook differences in other policy areas, such as human rights and democratization. This is similar to what the second Bush Administration has done.

The US has pursued its foreign and security policy by proxy. It is done by building institutions domestically or through international institutions based on principal values of liberal internationalism (Arlidge, 2011; Goh, 2005). With this involvement, the US has an influence in ASEAN's regional approaches to foreign and security policy. This is the explanation why ASEAN was in a deadlock situation without any accepted *communiqué* for the first time in its 45-years history in ASEAN's 2012 summit in Cambodia (Saragih, 2012). The region was divided whether to support US or China in deciding the substantial and acceptable solution for SCS dispute. China is deeply influencing Cambodia while other states have deeply embedded in the US security area through a hub-and-spoke system.

Second, is to spread democracy and human rights. Advancing democracy and human rights is the central pillar of US engagement throughout SEA. The US is ensuring wide dissemination of these ideas through elite accommodation and institutional crafting of plural society in the SEA democratization (US National Intelligence Council, 2004: 43). The utilization of liberal internationalism by the US was mainly done by promoting democracy and pressing human rights issues as 'the only game in the town'. If not, there will be attempt to overthrow the independent political order by hook or by crook. New international forces, whether taking the form of demands by donor countries for human rights, global capitalism's structural requirements for meritorious selection and consumerism, NGOs or the media's advocacy, appear recently to have combined in ways that promote democracy's liberal dimensions.



In my view, democracy and human rights are commonly accepted in the region as ideal condition that meets the level of civil, political liberties and rights sufficiently to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation. However, these ideas often have been implemented in different nomenclatures because of the bitter colonial experience and the idea of political culture. O'Neil (2010: 115) posited that political culture is "essentially the argument that there are differences in societal institutions-norms and values-that shape the landscape of political activity." Because of their background in a protracted and often conflictual process of decolonization the regional security complex in SEA shaped by a mixture of acceptance for liberal democracy. The West's imperial quest for resources and its intense colonization in the region have made negative image in the people. It should be noted also that there are various styles of democracy in the region, for instance in Indonesia and Malaysia there is *gotong royong* concept which is spirit of mutual help in society.

Any attempt to push singular democratization to the region is actually counterproductive, because the developmental challenges in the SEA region are wide and varied. The countries comprising ASEAN have varied political systems, socio-cultural systems, and rates of economic developments. If the US wants to sustain its hegemonic project in the region then it is must pay attention to these considerations. By and large, this is what the Obama Administration learnt from the previous administration especially dealing with of so-called "Islamic terrorism" in the region. Terrorism is a clear threat for the US to preserve its centered order in the region.

Third, the Obama Administration wants to prevent latent threats such as terrorism coming to the surface. The objective of the Obama Administration to the Islamic world is to reshape the negative image of Bush's unilateral and neo-conservative policy. In the SEA region it added with not to bandwagon with China.

In the context of SEA, it is difficult to achieve because of negative civic consent of US 'contemporary legacy of empire' in Muslim countries, such as the US-led invasion in Iraq in 2003, war in Afghanistan 2001, and the US staunch support for Israel against the Palestinian cause. As with many other Muslims in the world, SEA's Muslims were not happy with terrorist stigmas produced by counterterrorism and the deradicalization policies of Bush's Administration. And this is exactly what Obama Administration is trying to reshape to end years of mistrust between the West and the Muslim world with his first visit to Indonesia in 2010 (Jakarta Post, 2010; Guardian, 2010). However, the presence reality suggests the opposite direction in President Obama's rhetoric. Apparently he still commits to use American military in his foreign policy objectives.

Obama's doctrine is basically a far more focused approach to US adversaries; a shift from the martial policies and bellicose rhetoric of the Bush administration. The Bush doctrine was basically a principle of sustaining a global *Pax Americana* with the strategy of pre-emptive strikes against threats to US national security. It is a global battle against terrorist in his words "either you are with us or against us" (BBC, 2002).

Therefore, the US SEA strategy is likely a continuation of Bush's policy in a more subtle way, yet at same shifting focus to restrain China by forging alliances in the region. Keating (2007) posited that the US strategy issued by the US Pacific Command (PACOM) in November 2008 is based on "partnership and military readiness." In Bush's era it was more assertive but in Obama's era it is apparently deceptive in downplaying the military preeminence at least on the half of his administration. In fact, it has changed drastically from 2012 where US Marines were set for Darwin deployment (Siegel, 2012). If in Bush's Administration the US is seeking to root out non-traditional security threats via cooperative security. In the Obama's Administration, it is seeking to root out traditional and non-traditional security threats to advance its national interests. For instance, from 2005, the US has a ministerial dialogue with SEA to discuss mainly terrorism, Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) proliferation, and preparation for possible pandemics (Sheldon, 2012: 6).

America's interests are inextricably linked to the durability of US-centered order. In the US Quadrennial Defence Review (QDR) 2010 (US DoD, 2010: 59), the US military objective is to "enhance our long-standing alliances with Thailand and the Philippines, to deepen our partnership with Singapore, and to develop new strategic relationship with Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam, to address issues such as counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics, and to support humanitarian assistance operations in the region. The United States is also encouraging the continued development of multilateral institutions and other integrated approaches to regional security affairs."

Furthermore, it is noted in the QDR 2011 (US DoD, 2010: 10) that "whenever possible, the United States will use force in an internationally sanctioned coalition with allies, international regional organizations, and like-minded nations committed to these common principles. America's Armed Forces will retain the ability to act unilaterally and decisively when appropriate, maintaining joint, all-domain military capabilities that can prevail across a wide range of contingencies." Obama and his senior officials have successfully reframed Bush's global battle as a more narrowly focused struggle against al Qaeda in a decisive ways. They stopped using the term of global war on terror and instead described it as a campaign against a single, clearly identifiable group (Rohde, 2012). It seems the strategy put importance on the continuation of Bush doctrine, but with more caution and a 'not alone' approaches (Richter, 2012).

The recent upsurge of terrorism reminds the US that any ambitious project of liberalism will create a backlash to US national interest and degenerate the liberal system in international political economy. This is why the US has to show more cautious action, respect the interests of other countries or not trying to enforce it by committing more strongly to underpinning a liberal economic system with bilateral means and regional or multilateral institutions supported by coercive power.

## **Conclusion**

US strategy in SEA is the part of US reengagement in Asia strategy, knowing that it is a region that shapes the future of the stability of the region and for the entire world. The US vital interests in SEA are rooted in military, economic, and value stakes. It is basically built upon partnership with military pre-eminence. The US SEA strategy is basically defined in two approaches. First, it is by commitment focusing more regional development mostly via bilateral ties and second, and it is done by advancing its strategic policy to contain China in the region. The US sees China's rising prominence would steer the region in the direction that reduces American influence and against US interests. It is about the fundamental cooperation sustained by inoculation of regimes and sustained by military supports to mitigate situations that could lead to conflict and crisis.

Many aspects of US policy towards SEA correspond to previous administration, e.g. Bush's administration. The difference from the latter to the previous administration is the focus of Bush's administration more aggressive and solitary one. Obama's foreign policy is more gradualist, sociable, and impulsive foreign policy. The strategic orientation is still the same by using hard power to pursue its objectives. In other words, the mentality of either "you with us or against us" is still prevalence. US exceptionalism, secularism, and military intervention in internal conflicts of other countries have become common words for the US. The US in SEA does not lack perception or native wit to pursue the same objective at the same moment. Obama's administration crafted strategy to press SEA countries not to bandwagon with China while they are still encouraged to strengthening economic ties. At the same time, Obama's administration keeps containing China with military expansion in the region.

Policy recommendation from this study relates to the will of foreign policy of Indonesian government to pursue its national interest assertively but wisely. Indonesia must ensure that any attempt to dictate the legitimate Indonesian government in controlling the political and economic order in Indonesia will be counterproductive. Based upon free and active foreign policy principles, Indonesia is willing to cooperate with any countries on equal basis.

Indonesia should condemn any attempt conducted by any country or any who is trying to enforce its will by hook or by crook. Last but not least, Indonesia should alert and expand its ideology, politics, economy, society, culture, and defence and security policy in deterring challenges, obstacles, threats, and harassments internationally or domestically, directly or indirectly by proxy war or asymmetric warfare. ●

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