

THE DINAMICS OF MAJOR-POWER RELATION AND ITS INFLUENCES TOWARD ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL ORDER IN CONTEMPORARY ERA

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Abstract - Asia-Pacific as the "pivot" of the 21st century area, related to the various issues that became the main agenda when discussing the development of international politics today. The dynamics of major-power relations as the complexity of the USA-China relations has effect significantly to the regional order in Asia Pacific. The urgency of reshaping the regional order in Asia Pacific is when China as an emerging power presenting a threat towards US hegemony existence in the region. The dynamics of major-power relations have indirectly created perceptions of the strengthening of China's influence in the regional level, which leads to the centralistic weakening of US leadership in Asia-Pacific. Simultaneously, the creation of peace and the stability of regional security also demands the re-establishment of an Asia-Pacific regional order that can accommodate the possibility of a truly transitional US power over China.

Keyword: major-power relation, world order, Asia-Pacific, United States of America, the rise of China

Introduction

Nowadays, Asia-Pacific has become an area with complex problems, where the acceleration of economic progress happened accompanied by threats to regional security stability. The complexity is certainly inseparable from geographical factors where Asia-Pacific is not only a place of "residence", but also holds many national interests from big countries such as the United States (US), China, Japan

and South Korea.² The Asia-Pacific is also known as the "center of gravity" of international politics today, where the geo-economic and geopolitical establishment of the region becomes the main focus for any countries concerned in the region, especially the US and China. The structure of the regional order undergoes significant changes through the phenomenon of China's rise as emerging power. This is evidenced when China succeeded in surpassing Japan as

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² Michael Yahuda, *The International Politics of The Asia-Pacific*, (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004), p.8.

Asia's biggest economic power in 2010 and came second after the United States as the world's largest (GDP) country.³

The emergence of China as Asia's new power, has brought diverse impacts and perceptions. Concerns from various parties emerged, linking China's phenomenon as emerging power in the region with China's unilateral claim to the South China Sea (SCS). A number of academics and observers note that the Asia-Pacific today bears the "pivot" of the area, which is crucial to the future of the US as a country of hegemon as well as its Chinese challenger. Thus, any strategic competition in any form if it can not be accommodated properly will have a negative impact on the stability of the region's security.⁴

The dynamics of major-power relations now become "key words" in seeing US-China relations and interactions that are crucial to today's international political constellation. The US with hegemonic status is certainly in the status quo, so the present regional order is inseparable from US influence, power, and interests over Asia-Pacific. Rebalancing of

Asia in 2011, illustrates US efforts to respond to China's growing resurgence that is increasingly showing a stance contrary to US interests in Asia-Pacific. Thus, the term "major-power relations" is a description of the connectedness of the two great powers in Asia-Pacific, where there is a correlation therein, which is more dominated by competition and strategic competition between the US and China. How the dynamics of major-power relations affects the re-establishment of regional order in Asia-Pacific, based on US-China perception in projecting the development of power in the future. In addition, the phenomenon of the rise of China presents a structural challenge to the creation of regional security stability that enables the transition of power, as a continuation of China influence in the region.

Major-Power Relations in Regional Hegemony Competition

The major-power relation perceptions are built on two fundamental arguments: The United States maintains the status quo as a hegemon state, and on the other hand

³ Yoko Hagiwara, "U.S. European Policies Toward China Amid Its Economic and Political Rise", *Tokyo Economic Review*, Vol 1, No.10, 2006, p. 2.

⁴ Patrick M. Cronin, "Power and Order in the South China Sea: A Strategic Framework for U.S. Policy", Center for a New American Security (CNAS), 2016, p.3.

China has emerged as an emerging power that is slowly trying to build strength to be in a position equivalent to the US as well as to prepare self towards the transition of power.⁵ The transition of power is certainly not an easy matter. China itself realizes that replacing the US position as a single world hegemon in the near future is impossible.⁶ It is estimated that China itself has not been able to compete comprehensively with the US until the 2040s, albeit with China's continued rising GDP. Forcing the will to counter the US influence, especially in terms of the dominance of the regional security architecture, is an action that is fatal to China.⁷ This means that China, despite all conditions, must "respect" US hegemony. Being a "sub-system" under a US-administered regional order structure is certainly an alternative way of extending its influence in Asia-Pacific. It opens opportunities for China, where in its history China has not been much involved and has had a major impact on the establishment of the Asia-Pacific region.

The assumptions about the tension between them lead to Chinese behavior that begins to show a counter-productive attitude toward both the US and international law, as China's provocative form in the SCS. Like the Cold War, the security dilemma dominated the decision maker in Beijing. The US democratization agenda is considered a weakening of China's domestic politics. As for Rebalancing of Asia, it is understood as a form of containment strategy through active occupation of the US military in Asia-Pacific since 2011. Relying on the realism argument, so for China the military capability improvement is a self defense effort to do "self help" from the threat of US hegemony. Recognizing that conditions are not easy, the Chinese government is increasing the capability of A2 / AD (anti-Access / area denial) capabilities-submarines through the installation of ASCMs (Anti-Ship Cruise Missiles) or ASBMs (Anti-Ship Ballistic Missiles) developed since 2012.⁸ To provide deterrence effects to the US,

⁵ Robert Daly, "How Washington Can Manage Sustainable Strategic Competition With China", *The Diplomat*, September 22nd 2015, on <http://thediplomat.com/2015/09/how-washington-can-manage-sustainable-strategic-competition-with-china/>. Accessed on December 21st 2017.

⁶ Zhiqun Zhu, *US-China Relations in the 21st Century Power Transition and Peace*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 167.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 169.

⁸ Tetsuo Kotani, "US-Japan Allied Maritime Strategy: Balancing the Rise of Maritime China", *Strategic Japan*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2014, p. 1.

China deployed SAMs (Surface-to-Air Missiles) on the island of Woody part of the Paracels archipelago that claimed five decades ago.⁹

China's economic strength currently seems to have an effect on military capabilities. Where the geostrategy embodies the SCS mastery, followed by a reclamation project for the purpose of militarization of a number of corals in the Spratly islands. The affirmation of unilateral claims in the SCS is a continuing urgency despite the international outcry and protest. With this, the hegemonic competition in the region is the goal of China's military projection. Emphasized in the Defense White Paper (2008), China has issued a defense policy based on the importance of Blue Water Navy mastery, to support the future projection of China's geostrategy. In an effort to counter the international perception of the threat to regional security stability, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi affirmed that the development of military force is "self-defense facilities" for China's national

security interests, and there is no violation of international law.¹⁰

Amid escalating conflict escalation in SCS, the US in 2015 took precautionary measures by increasing the number of fleets in the Pacific, 7th Fleet, based in Yokosuka. The US got some additional Battle-Surface Ship ships. Then the US also replaced the USS George Washington aircraft carrier with USS Ronald Reagan, wielding the largest missile destroyer USS Zumwalt (DDG 1000). The 4 billion USD Armored warship produced by Bath Iron Works, equipped with weapons capable of firing targets from 100 miles apart, has the advantage of being 50 times more difficult to detect by radar. A total of 143 trained crew members were also alerted. In response to China's declaration of ADIZ (Air Defense Identification Zone) over the territorial waters of Senkaku/Diaoyu, which received strong protests from the Japanese government, the United States again put two units of Aegis destroyers to stand on Okinawa base. A total of 368,000 US military personnel in Asia-Pacific remain. Dimatra air of 395 units of fifth

⁹ Thomas G. Mahnken, *Asia in The Balance: Transforming US Military Strategy in Asia*, (Washington: A Project of America Institute, 2012), p.7.

¹⁰ Helen Davison, "South China Sea Dispute: Beijing Places missile launches on islang-as it

happened", February 17th 2016, dalam <http://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2016/feb/17south-china-sea-disputes-bajing-Places-missile-launches-on-islant-live>. Accessed on July 2nd 2017.

generation fighter aircraft, F-35 and F-22 in the next few years has been prepared.¹¹ The Joint Entry Operation and Air Sea Battle strategy was adopted to reposition troops aimed at supporting the addition of warships and US military personnel in Asia-Pacific that will continue until 2020.¹²

Rebalancing of Asia is on the global agenda, where "deficit trust" as happened in SCS, North Korea's nuclear, and overlapping claims of ADIZ in East Asia are the main factors influencing US presence. Asia-Pacific as the "Pivot" of the 21st century area, entering a new era when US military dominance, is a form of containment strategy towards China in the region. But the Chinese government considers that the Pentagon's intervention of the SCS conflict will have a fatal impact on the region's security. Instead of providing security guarantees for peaceful dispute resolution, it will increase the escalation of the conflict, when the US and China are unable to refrain from provocative action. Decision makers in China say Washington is

formulating ways on how comprehensive measures are based on international norms and laws. The existing deficit trust instead builds China's negative opinion that freedom of navigation, a form of exploitation of the SCS conflict issue to reaffirm US dominance in Asia-Pacific.¹³

Thus, the major-power relation, at an alarming point, balance of power creates a new strategic environment in which the rise of China is similar to the revival of international realism. Realists understand that the distribution of power both the US and China has led to a new power structure. Security dilemma incarnated as the psychological impact of the country, when the US hegemony faced serious challenges from the rise of China. Instead, the status of emerging power forced Beijing to think hard in formulating the right strategy to position itself against the various pressures from the US, while avoiding the mistakes that actually became "boomerang" for China's own interests. As history proves that power naturally determines the direction of the

¹¹ Jim Gramone, "Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy", on February 15th 2015, <http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/NDAA%20A-PMaritimeSecurityStrategy08142015-1300-FINALFORMAT.PDF> Accessed on March 17th 2017.

¹² Chirs Mills, *The United State Asia-Pacific Policy and the Rise of the Dragon*, (Sidney: Australian Defense College, 2015), p. 2.

¹³ Cui Liru, "Managing Strategic Competition Between China and the U.S", June 15th 2016, on <http://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/managingstrategiccompetitionbetween-chinaandtheus> Accessed on December 21st 2017.

nature of international politics. Proven from the beginning of the cold war, the Asia-Pacific security structure is under US domination, which then acts as a mediator in every conflict, supporting the enforcement of regional norms, and international law. The use of economic capability and military capability as a guarantee for the creation of peace and stability of the security of the region is at its responsibility.

The Asia-Pacific regional order that allows countries in Asia to focus on political and economic development is a political commitment, in order to maintain the stability of US hegemony.¹⁴ Maintaining strategic dominance over Asia-Pacific is a vital object in which the United States wants to ensure that there is no other option for any country to feel in the regional order leading to economic liberalization, democratic governance and compliance with applicable international law.¹⁵ China is one of the Asia-Pacific countries that also benefit from the enforcement of the mechanism. This pessimistic attitude deepens the

development of major-power relations, seeking other forms in which the United States accommodates and allows Chinese freedom to contribute more to the regional order, nor does it seem to guarantee China's compliance with prevailing international structures, norms and laws. The Asia-Pacific is experiencing difficult conditions, where the development of regionalism increasingly leading to the economic integration of countries in the region, does not significantly prevent the strategic competition that leads to a real threat to the peace and stability of the region's security.

Donald Trump The New Era of US Leadership in Asia-Pacific

Donald Trump's victory in the US election in early 2017 has started a new era for US leadership in the global arena. As a Republican politician, Trump since the beginning of the campaign period has underlined the Asia-Pacific as the ultimate goal of US global politics. Despite its controversial policies out of membership

¹⁴ John F. Kerry, "Nominee for Secretary of State, Statement Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations", 24 January 2013, dalam <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2013/01/203455.htm>. Accessed on 18 December 2017.

¹⁵ Tom Donilon, "President Obama's Asia Policy and Upcoming Trip to Asia", White House, 15

November 2012, dalam <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/11/15/remarks-national-security-advisortomdonilonprepareddelivery>. Accessed on 21 December 2017.

of the TPP (Trans Pacific Partnership), and amid global concerns about the growing assumptions about US isolationists, Trump remains unchanged in the direction of US policy towards geopolitics in Asia-Pacific. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson explains that freedom of navigation, and Overflight against the LCS region is absolute. The United States is trying to pressure China to stop restricting international shipping currents in the region and is subject to international legal provisions.¹⁶ In addition, Trump insists on maintaining bilateral alliances with Japan and South Korea, in order to dampen the escalation of the conflict and maintain US military dominance in Asia-Pacific.¹⁷

Under the Trump administration, there are at least three US policy moves in Asia, first with a bilateral approach, the US will seriously address strategic competition with China on many issues. Second, support for the alliance is strengthened to secure US interests. Third, reforming the Rebalancing of Asia

agenda during the Obama administration that "liberal international postwar order" is considered not fully re-affirming the US supremacy.¹⁸ US Defense Secretary James N. Mattis, at the Shangri-La Dialogue meeting, insisted that Washington's approach to Asia-Pacific was also aimed at suppressing bilateral trade mechanisms in which it is in line with US policy out of TPP membership. This seems to be causing obstacles, especially countries in the region, where the absence of the US in economic integration will greatly affect the economic sustainability of the region.¹⁹ The phenomenon leads to a fundamental question as to whether the "liberal international postwar order" which has so far initiated US leadership in Asia-Pacific will be maintained.²⁰

US Minister of International Affairs, Rex Tillerson stated that "strategic patience" by simply emphasizing the multilateral mechanism of diplomacy has proved ineffective in reducing the escalation of conflict in the region. The

¹⁶ Abraham M. Denmark, "Mattis Should Explain Trump's Asia Pacific Strategy, if One Exists", 1 June 2017, on <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/06/01/mattis-shouldexplaintrumpsasiapacificstrategyifone-exists/>. Accessed on 8 December 2017.

¹⁷ Leszek Buszynski, "Why is the South China Sea so important to the U.S.?", Australian National University, 18 January 2017, on https://www.upi.com/Top_News/Voices/2017/01/18/WhyistheSouthChinaSeasoimportantto-

theUS/5761484751063/. Accessed on 8 December 2017.

¹⁸ Ashley Townshend, *America First: US Asia Policy under President Trump*, (Sydney: University of Sydney United States Studies Centre, 2017), pp.2.

¹⁹ Chia-yi Lee & Su-Hyun Lee, "The Trump Era and The Trade Architecture in The Asia Pacific", *RSIS Policy Report*, 2017, pp. 6.

²⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 7.

United States under the Trump government has asserted that preemptive strike and defensive intervention will be highly likely to be a strategic consideration of Trump for Asia-Pacific security. It is a form of US assertiveness against North Korea's nuclear development.²¹ Several times have conducted nuclear disarmament trials, it is a reality that stopping Pyongyang is not enough just by international law. The Washington, Tokyo, Seoul alliance should again consider North Korea's denuclearization strategy, including approaching bilateral diplomacy by Trump and Kim Jong Un.²² High-level diplomacy is a step Trump must take to encourage Xi Jinping's active role, which has always been the cornerstone of Pyongyang's diplomacy when it gets international sanctions. The United States stressed that economic factors could be a political consideration for China to stop North Korea's nuclear weapons development program.²³

Trump's controversial policy, re-done by meeting Tsai Ing-wen President of Taiwan to increase bilateral strategic partnership.²⁴ The Trump Administration sees that the ideological approach underpinning US-Taiwan diplomatic relations is the main basis of US geostrategy in stemming the expansion of Chinese influence in Asia-Pacific. US commitment to security guarantee against Taiwan is realized through the expansion of defense cooperation such as transfer of technology, sales of defense equipment, exchange officers, to joint training.²⁵ Starting US defense policy, Trump sees that the trends of developing countries' powers in Asia-Pacific force the US to increase the state defense budget to 54 trillion USD in 2018. With the large amount of the budget, the US is certainly able to support the policy of military balancing by emphasizing the strategy of forward presence, major alliances, and deterrence. The Pentagon insists that the development of warship technology, and

²¹ Matt Rivers dan Joshua Berlinger, "Tillerson Promises New Policy on North Korea After '20 Years of a Failed Approach'", 2 April 2017, dalam <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/03/16/politics/tillerson-japan-north-korea>, on Giuseppe Spatafora, "Trump's Foreign Policy in Asia", *Istituto Affari Internazionali*", 2017, pp. 4.

²² *Ibid*, pp. 5.

²³ Orville Schell, Susan L. Shirk dan Chairs, *US Policy Toward China: Recommendation for a New*

Administration, (UC SanDiego: Asia Society Center U.S-China Relation, 2017), p.11.

²⁴ Amy B. Wang, Emily Rauhala, dan William Wan, "Why People Are Making Such a Big Deal About the Trump- Taiwan Call," 5 December 2016, *The Washington Post*, dalam <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/world-views/wp/2016/12/05/why-people>. Accessed on January 4th 2018.

²⁵ Ashley Townshend, *op.cit*, pp. 3.

aircraft is an option to keep US military dominance in Asia-Pacific. Senate Chief of US Armed Services Committee John McCain, explaining the policies related to the development of 350 warships is a form of realization of Trump's "promise" during elections. The propaganda of US military domination of the "Pivotal" area aims to launch a deterrence strategy against Chinese military activity especially in the SCS.²⁶

Trump's priority on security threat issues in Asia-Pacific that impact on the stability of regional hegemony has slightly shifted US attention to the role of regional institutions such as ASEAN. Trump, on the other hand, puts more emphasis on bilateral dialogues in solving the problems that develop in the region. Some senior US officials judge that Trump's policy will affect the level of dependence of developing countries to the US. Whereas the US is the main destination for every regional institution including ASEAN.²⁷

The importance of US presence in regional forums is still needed, as is the joint statement between Trump and Shinzo Abe, the President of Japan on the importance of maintaining the regional institutions underlying US interests towards the re-establishment of tsranas in the Asia-Pacific region. Starting Trump's leadership era, issues such as peacekeeping, non-proliferation, human rights, climate change, global health, maritime domains and so on, do not seem to be the main focus of the United States. Some experts judge that simply emphasizing bilateral engagement on conventional issues considered threatening to US hegemony in the region has regenerated US neo-isolationism in the contemporary era.²⁸ It seems to rule out the existence of the US against regional institutions, where it proved to affect the "building trust" which over the last decade became the main focus of the Obama administration.

²⁶ *Ibid*, on. 7. Read more on Senator John McCain, "Restoring American Power," *Senate Armed Services Committee*, January 16th 2017, in https://www.mccain.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/25bff0ec-481e-466a-843f-68ba5619e6d8/restoring-american-power-7.pdf. Accessed on 8 January 2018.

²⁷ Ashley Townshend, *op.cit*, 2017 pp.7. Lihat, Mike Pompeo, "Failed to go beyond reaffirming

US alliances and advocating freedom of navigation manoeuvres in his South China Sea", House Resolution 830, 114th Congress, July 13th 2016, on <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-resolution/830/text>. Accessed on December 21st 2017.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 8.

US Protectionism Responds to China's Economic Progress

China's economic resurgence has brought its own dilemma to the United States. In formulating a coherent and effective policy in restructuring the global economic and trade system. More than that, Trump's controversial policy and China's confrontational stance on some strategic issues, is increasingly leading the major-power relations on uncertain conditions. This phenomenon of inter-connectivity and interdependence on market mechanisms, trade, and investment, as a response to globalization become the main issue of China, where the economy influenced China's security policy in the region.²⁶ In 2015, China became the world's largest exporter with a total of 2.14 billion USD. The expansion of the Chinese market is also targeting the US, which is also the largest consumer market in the world. The policy of US protectionism, of course, will greatly affect the progress of the Chinese economy which has the largest total trade in the world.²⁹

The increasing of unemployment rate and trade deficit became the main reasons why Trump protects the US economy. In addition, the policy is also a sign of concern the Trump's administration in seeing China's economic progress. Under the Republican influence, Trump built an opinion that like an economic warfare, the urgency that the United States is facing today is how to hold the Chinese economy. Research conducted by Wall Street Investment Banks, predicts, economic protection will be done by pressing more than 50% of imported goods, and provide opportunities back to US domestic companies. With such policy, China's trading profits since 2004 will be drop dramatically.³⁰ With an achievement of 161.6 trillion USD in 2015, it has described of the importance of the US presence as a market base for China, whereas the US also relies on China in purchasing dollar-based assets and debt loans to 1.115 trillion USD until October 2016.³¹

Under certain conditions, extreme trade protectionism will aggravate the

²⁹ Tim Wallace, "Trump's trade plans could knock China's rise to riches off course", February 18th 2017, in <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2017/02/18/trumpstradeplanscouldknockchinarise-richescourse>. Accessed on January 8th 2018.

³⁰ Phidel Vineles, "US-China Economic Ties Under Trump: Need for More Balance", *RSIS Commentary*, No. 66, 2017, p. 2.

³¹ *Ibid*, p.2.

existing problems and lead to a re-emergence of deflationary pressure for China. Eventually it will affect the growth of China's exports. Not only China, a significant production capacity will also present a new era of "economic depression" for other countries that are bound with the US trade cooperation.³² But economic protectionism needs to be balanced with macroeconomic policy projections to anticipate the China's economic surge, as well as maintaining a strategic "asset" of the US economy at the global level.³³

With the current economic power, China has been a major trading partner for every country, the largest export destination, and a country with foreign investment that spread across most of Asia. The geographical advantage that China directly borders on the mainland with Central Asia countries and the maritime with the East Pacific and Southeast Asia countries, that is realized by building the initiative of Maritime Silk Roads. The declaration is a desire of China to realize a comprehensive maritime

cooperation platform involving other countries such as Thailand, India, Pakistan, to some Middle East and North Africa countries. By promoting blue partnership, blue economic, maritime safety, blue engine and maritime shipping, President Xi Jinping believes that Maritime Silk Roads will be a model of maritime integration in the 21st century for sustainable development.³⁴ In addition, China also continues the OBOR (One Belt, One Road) initiative. With this initiative, China is trying to explore their potential to fulfill the fundamental aspects of economy, cultural politics, and strategy. The initiative will deliver new opportunities for China to open the investments towards the infrastructure, both inland and marine infrastructure that will connect China to other countries in the Southeast Asia, Middle East, and Africa.³⁵

The needs of interdependence and interconnectedness between countries in the globalization era encourages China to play an active role to show their existence of political constellation in the Asia-Pacific region. The effort toward economic

³² Tim Wallace, *op.cit.*

³³ Phidel Vineles, *op.cit.*

³⁴ PTI, China Unveils Maritime Silk Road Plans, Economic Times, June 20th 2017, in <http://m.economictimes.com/news/defese/china-unveils-maritime-silk-road>

plans/articleshow/59238384.cms. Accessed on December 22nd 2017

³⁵ Shen Yamei, "Strengthening Regional Order in the Asia-Pacific: An Analysis of China Japan US Perspectives", July 26th 2017, in http://www.ciis.org.cn/english/2016-08/19/content_8975495.htm.

integration is like a momentum for China to not only gain the profit from market expansion, but also to prove that China with existing capability is able to sustain and give the significant influence on the regional economic growth. According to the statistics, Chinese investment reached 170 billion USD and increased 44.1% or about 235 billion USD in 2016. That achievement is a proof of China's efforts in the middle of global economic slowdown. According to the statistics, Chinese investment reached 170 billion USD and increased 44.1% or about 235 billion USD in 2016. That achievement is a proof of China's efforts in the middle of global economic slowdown.³⁶ Like an unstoppable economic driving "machine", then protectionism is considered as the only way out in response to China's economic growth.³⁴ Gaining enormous pressure from the US public, Trump is also aware about the risk of excessive protectionism will adversely affect the investment opportunities in the future. Art Hogan, an analyst at Wunderlich Securities, argues that Trump has pioneered the "trade wars," in which

conditions will determine the US existence in Asia-Pacific.³⁵

The Influence of Major-Power Relations Toward Asia-Pacific Regional Order

Apart from the strategic contestation that dominates the major-power relations, US-China in fact also establish the mutual-cooperation that mutually beneficial. In some ways, major-power relations are at a certain ambiguity, where the cooperation and rivalry slightly happen at the same time. Should be taken an important note that the above reality might happen on the common interest in some fields such as global warming, Iran nuclear issue, global development, military-to-military communication, human rights, peacekeeping operation, global war on terror, might not happen in the real problems such as the conflict over the SCS, North Korean nuclear, Taiwan, and the regional military projection.³⁷

The bilateral meeting between Barack Obama and Xi Jinping by the end 2014, did not significantly develop the mutual-trust expected for the development of the regional order. Rivalry of both countries becomes a big

³⁶ Irene Chan dan Li Mingjiang, "China's rise and role in the Asia-Pacific", 1 Juni 2017, in <http://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/chinas->

[riseandroleintheasiapacific](http://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/chinas-riseandroleintheasiapacific). Accessed on December 23rd 2017.

³⁷ Orville Schell, et al, *op cit*, p. 31.

challenge in realizing the commitment for peace, security stability, and the welfare of Asia-Pacific. Like a logical consequence, the present of China as the emerging power might affects politically for the development of the major-power relations, and its impact for the Asia-Pacific. Moreover, the liberal international postwar order, which has been under the sole US leadership, is considered incapable in accommodating the rise of China.³⁸ Gordon Chang, a Chinese-American columnist, in his *The Coming Collapse of China*, stated that the rise of China has emerged a basic question about does the rise of China mean the collapse of US? Further could the current regional order become the power-base for the power transition from Washington supremacy to Beijing supremacy?³⁹

In the view of realism, both questions illustrate the pessimistic attitude arises because of the liberal international postwar order could no longer fully guarantee China to be subject of the regional order under the dominance of the US. The regional order of Asia-

Pacific also faces the 'unique' transformation, when the regionalism paradigm directs the development of the regional economic integration, simultaneously with the high intensity of conflicts. Therefore major-power relation has spawned the paradox for the Asia-Pacific regional order. Mentioned as paradox because of the strategic rivalry between US-China ends up on the increment of conflict intensity, along with the commitment of both countries toward the stability of the regional security as written in ADMM (ASEAN Defense Ministerial Meeting), ADMM+, ARF (ASEAN Regional Forum), EAS (East Asia Summit) and Shangri-La Dialogue.

The scheme of balance of power in some issues becomes the other form of the regional order characteristic of Asia-Pacific, especially to illustrate the strategic rivalry of US-China. John Mearsheimer, a realist, stated that the equivalent position to the US, is the threat towards the status quo, where China is potentially becomes the barrier for the US and its alliances interest in Asia-Pacific.⁴⁰ Until the election

³⁸ Takashi Inoguchi and Paul Bacon, "Empire, Hierarchy, and Hegemony: American Grand Strategy and the Construction of Order In the Asia-Pacific", *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol.5, No 2, 2005, p. 120.

³⁹ Alexander L. Vuving, *What Regional Order for the Asia-Pacific? China's Rise, Primacy*

Competition, and Inclusive Leadership, (Honolulu: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2012), p. 214.

⁴⁰ John Mearsheimer, "Maintain U.S. Dominance in The Western Hemisphere and Prevent China from Achieving Regional Hegemony in Asia, August 21st 2015, in

of Trump as the US President, the commitment of bilateral defense alliance, Japan and South Korea have been the coercive diplomacy ‘pillar’ for the US. The presence of US military does not only become the ‘umbrella’ of security towards the North Korean nuclear threat, but the deterrence strategy aims to guard the US leadership over the Asia-Pacific.⁴¹ Major-power relation marked out by the rivalry over the geographic mastery happened on the SCS conflict, the improvement of military capability, has illustrated the actualization of balance of power scheme.

To date, the US hegemony remains undeniable, but at the same time no single formulation has been found to guarantee the future of the Asia-Pacific regional order re-establishment. Reflecting to the dynamics of major-power relation, there are two basic elements that should be understood, the first the rise of China definitely desires the “shared regional leadership” as the new “prototype” towards the Asia-Pacific regional order. However, this effort is collided to the existence of US hegemony. Second, the

existing problem by the end would be the serious challenge for the security stability of Asia-Pacific, when the security dilemma has “covered” all of the interactions between US and China.⁴² As the win-win solution, the US commitment should continue to promote the creation of inclusive regional order where the security stability order of Asia-Pacific becomes the collective responsibility through the regional institutional mechanism.⁴³

But like a dualism, besides of the regional institutional mechanism, major-power relation requires the US to take the preventive action in implementing direct diplomacy, to all of the ‘stakeholders’ in the region including Australia, India, South Korea, Japan, ASEAN, and China. The dualism is the bargaining tools in convincing the ‘stakeholders’ towards the re-establishment of stable regional order under the US hegemony. The action is the form of US awareness that the regional institution is incapable and not fully legally binding to bind the countries’ behavior under the legal and agreed regional norms.⁴⁴ All of the parties have agreed if

<http://nationalinterest.org/feature/weasked-johnmearsheimerwhatshouldbethepurpose-13642>. Accessed on December 8th 2017.

⁴¹ Jeffrey A. Bader, *op.cit*, 2016, p.12.

⁴² Alexander L. Vuving, *op cit*, 2012, p.222.

⁴³ Andrew Browne, “Can China Be Contained?” *The Wall Street Journal* online, June 12th 2015, dalam <https://www.wsj.com/articles/can-china-be-contained-1434118534>. Accessed on July 21st 2016.

⁴⁴ Jeffrey A. Bader, *op.cit*, 2016, p. 12.

the peace and security of Asia-Pacific is the collective interest, but the effort is inseparable from the US interest of hegemony stability.⁴⁵ It shows that the current Asia-Pacific regional order has its limitation in realizing the regional security stability, and also it demands the global agenda of leadership transition from Washington to Beijing.

This condition proves that the strategic rivalry of US-China has created the exclusivity for the Asia-Pacific regional order, where the power becomes the main alternative for both countries, to influence the Asia-Pacific region. Brig Arun Sahgal, the professor and the international politics expert of Delhi Policy Group, in his research titled *Asia-Pacific Regional Order: Strategic Flux to Mutual Restraint*, stated that the US-China relations during the last two decades directed to the distribution of power that could initiate the establishment of 'geopolitical realism' in the region.⁴⁶ As explained earlier, the complexity of challenges lies on the major-power relation disorientation that leads to the

conflict of interest between US and China in the region. US realized that the position of status-quo does not mean separated from the process of hegemony weakening. It is considering the effort of China to capitalize the geopolitics potential towards "neo-Asian order" where the leadership central of Asia-Pacific sides to Beijing.⁴⁷ For the example, the conflict of SCS has created the 'room' for China to re-questioning the legitimacy of US as the "guarantor" of regional security stability. Bargaining power by the end becomes the way to show the current debates between the US hegemony and China as the emerging power.

Conclusion

The influence of major-power relation dynamics during the recent two decades has emerged the various perceptions about how to re-establish the Asia-Pacific regional order. The first Asia-Pacific regional order based on the liberal international postwar order since the Cold War, is deemed to have ceased to guarantee the China obey the dominance

⁴⁵ Jean Pierre Lehmann, Phasing out the US (dis)order in the Asia Pacific, *East Asia Forum*, June 8th 2017, in <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2017/06/08/phasingouttheusdisorderintheasiapacific/>.

⁴⁶ See further Brig Arun Sahgal, "Asia-Pacific Regional Order: Strategic Flux To Mutual

Restraint", *Delhi Policy Group*, http://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads_dpg/publication_file/remarks-at-primakov-reading-russia-1037.pdf, p. 4.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 11.

of the US. The contra-productive attitude of China towards the US interest in the region, and the provocative action in the disputed area of SCS, has a devastating impact to the peace and the security stability of the region. It shows that the major-power relation, has its limitation when the effort to create the regional security stability, also demands the global agenda of leadership transition from Washington to Beijing.

Secondly, on the worrisome position, the strategic rivalry of US-China has indirectly adopted the scheme of balance of power as the other characteristic of the Asia-Pacific regional order. Under the Trump administration, US has affirmed that the pre-emptive strike and the defensive intervention might be considered as the strategic policy of Trump for the security in Asia-Pacific. The demand of China for the realization of “shared regional leadership” as the “prototype” for Asia-Pacific regional order in fact has collided with the existence of US hegemony. Equivalent position to the China, is the threat for the status quo. It will weaken the bargaining position of US as the world only superpower. Thus, the complexity of the problems becomes the proof that the major-power relation has created the exclusivity for the regional

order in Asia-Pacific, when the US hegemony should face the phenomenon of the emergence of China that directed to the geopolitics shifting towards the leadership centrality of Asia-Pacific.

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