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## The Change and Continuity of the US Asia-Pacific Policy: From Obama to Trump

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*Man Fung Yeung*

*Alumni Graduate Institute of China Studies, Tamkang University*

*This paper aims to achieve two purposes. First, to discuss the US Asia-Pacific policy from the Obama Administration to the Trump Administration. The second is to compare the similarity and differences between Obama and Trump's Asia-Pacific policy. This paper extracts several hypotheses from John J. Mearsheimer's Offensive Realism. In this paper, I argue that China's activities in the Asia-Pacific were the pivotal factor for the US to alter its Asia-Pacific policy. Since the more China promotes different activities in the region, the more active the US becomes in ensuring its leadership. Besides, after comparing these two strategies, I believe that both were similar. Even there were some discrepancies on the way to implement them, the goal of both strategies was the same.*

### Introduction

Facing the rise of China and the challenges from the Asia-Pacific since 2008, President Obama shifted the US focus from the Middle East to the Asia-Pacific.<sup>1</sup> The Obama administration launched the "Pivot to Asia" Strategy in 2012, which was called "Rebalancing Asia." In Obama's strategy, the administration tried to consolidate the US presence by amplifying the relationship with its Asian allies, promoting liberal values, and integrating China into the US-led international order.<sup>2</sup> However, US officials found that China had become more

1 Other challenges including North Korea's nuclear threat, maritime disputes in East Asia, and other non-traditional security issues such as climate change and public health issues.

2 Hillary Clinton, "America's Pacific Century," *Foreign Policy*, October 11, 2011, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/americas-pacific-century/>

ambitious in their goals to dominate the region, thereby marginalizing the US influence in the Asia-Pacific. As a result, the “Rebalancing Asia” Strategy failed to respond to the rise of China during the Obama administration.<sup>3</sup>

After President Trump took office, he found it challenging to ensure the US leadership’s position in the Asia-Pacific since China had accelerated its influence in economic and geopolitical aspects. Therefore, President Trump proposed the term “Indo-Pacific” in 2017, gradually replacing the term “Asia-Pacific.”<sup>4</sup> In Trump’s “Indo-Pacific” Strategy, the administration tried to extend the US influence over the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean by intensifying the US alliance with Asia-Pacific states and engaging with India to slow down China’s economic, technological, geopolitical, and military development. Trump generally rejected the Obama administration’s foreign policy approaches, such as promoting liberal values and multilateralism. However, Trump’s “Indo-Pacific” strategy did, in fact, implement several of the same measures as Obama’s strategy, such as strengthening cooperation with potential partners. Therefore, it could be argued that there were only marginal differences between the two strategies.

This paper will discuss the change and continuity of the US Asia-Pacific Policy from the Obama Administration to the Trump Administration. To achieve these goals, I hypothesize based on John J. Mearsheimer’s theory of Offensive realism. In this paper, I argue that when China posed increasing challenges to the US during these two administrations, US policymakers believed it was necessary to circumscribe the rise of China to secure the US interests in Asia-Pacific.

### **Offensive Realism and the US Asia-Pacific Policy**

This article aims to explore the US Asia-Pacific policy from the Obama Administration to the Trump Administration. Although domestic factors such as populism and decision-makers played a role in the changing US Asia-Pacific policy, the regional security environment was the pivotal factor

3 Michael Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon: China’s Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower*, (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2016).

4 “Remarks by President Trump at APEC CEO Summit, Da Nang, Vietnam,” *U.S. Mission to ASEAN*, last modified November 10, 2017, <https://asean.usmission.gov/remarks-president-trump-apec-ceo-summit-da-nang-vietnam/>; Da-Jung Li, “Trump’s Indo-Pacific Strategy: Meaning and Implications,” *Tamkang Journal of International Affairs* 21, no. 3 (January/February, 2018): 165-169.

influencing the change in policy from Obama to Trump. Some analyses have adopted Neoclassical Realism to illustrate the changing of the US Asia-Pacific policy. Neoclassical Realism argues that domestic conditions such as elite cohesion and domestic pressure play a role in how a state responds to the external environment.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, Randall L. Schweller argues that nationalism plays a pivotal role in US foreign policy. Facing the US' power decline and people's reluctance to engage in international affairs, President Trump proposed the "American First" policy that emphasized the US' national interests and economy rather than international affairs. Therefore, President Trump rejected Obama's foreign policy. He no longer behaved generously to its allies; for instance, he required South Korea and NATO states to contribute more to defending themselves. In addition, the Trump Administration pulled out from multilateral organizations, renegotiated trade agreements with US trade partners and started a trade war against China to fulfill the US' interests.<sup>6</sup> Neoclassical Realism emphasizes domestic factors as the reason behind the Trump Administration becoming more retrenched in diplomacy. However, the theory distracts our attention from international pressure as the pivotal factor in the changing US Asia-Pacific policy from Obama to Trump. Whether a president adopted an engagement policy with China or tried to restrict its development, the strategies launched by both presidents needed to address challenges from the external environment.

In that sense, Offensive Realism is more suitable to illustrate the US China relationship during this period. In his work, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, John Mearsheimer provides a picture of power competition between great powers and the strategies that a great power adopts to ensure its position. Because the international system is antagonistic, there is no one to protect a state from external threats. Axiomatically, survival is the goal for a state to achieve. To ensure states' survival, the only thing states can do is become an expansionist until they become a regional hegemon. In

5 Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (October 1998): 144-172; Randall L. Schweller, "Unanswered Threats: A Neoclassical Realist Theory of Underbalancing," *International Security* 29, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 159-201.

6 Randall L. Schweller, "Opposite but Compatible Nationalisms: A Neoclassical Approach to the Future of US-China Relations," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 11, no. 1, (2018): 23-48; Randall Schweller, "Three Cheers for Trump's Foreign Policy: What the Establishment Misses," *Foreign Affairs* 97, No.5, (September 2018): 133-143.

other words, Mearsheimer assumes that the more relative gain a significant power enjoys, the more security a great power enjoys. However, when there is a challenger that tries to change the status-quo, the existing power will ensure its current interests and position by restricting the power acceleration of the rising power. In other words, the more relative gain a great power enjoys, the more likely the great power restricts its potential rival(s).<sup>7</sup>

To ensure the dominant position as regional hegemon, a great power adopts two strategies against the challenger: balancing and buck-passing strategies. Under the balancing strategy, the existing power tries to balance its rival through internal and external balancing. “Internal balancing” means that a great power enhances its military capability, thus preventing the invasion or provocation from an aggressor,<sup>8</sup> whereas “external balancing” means a great power formulates a “defensive alliance” to increase its influence in the region, thus mobilizing its allies to counter an aggressor collectively.<sup>9</sup> Other than military measures and alliance formation, the US has used the “Liberal Hegemony” strategy to maintain its hegemonic position after the Cold War Era. The US aims to impose liberal values on its rivals,<sup>10</sup> thereby incorporating them into the liberal international order.<sup>11</sup> This is because US policy makers believe that when their rivals or competitors are the members of the order, the US can impose multilateral pressure against them through the liberal international order.<sup>12</sup> Also, they believe that if their rivals or competitors become a democratic state, it is less likely they will start a war easily since they will need to seek prior agreement from their citizens. In other words, the US believes that the promotion of Liberalism helps ensure its leadership of the order. Apart from the balancing strategy, a buck-passing strategy is another way to counter an aggressor. It means a great power trying to pass the responsibility or share the burden with its allies in order to counter the

7 John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2014), 29-42.

8 Ibid., 157.

9 Ibid., 156.

10 Liberal values including Democratic Peace Theory, Economic Independence Theory, and Liberal Institutionalism. See: John J. Mearsheimer, *Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

11 Ibid., 1.

12 Stephen M. Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions: America's Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), 54-56.

aggressor collectively.<sup>13</sup> A great power can receive two benefits from a buck-passing strategy. First, the hegemon can manage its resources wisely when it relaxes the burden of security guarantee to its allies. Second, this tactic encourages buck-catchers to enhance their capability to defend themselves from an aggressor. In other words, it promotes buck-catchers to be self-reliant.<sup>14</sup>

In 2014, Mearsheimer predicted that keen competition between China and the US is inevitable; he argues that China's enlargement of its influence in the South China Sea and the East Sea are similar to what the US did in the Western Hemisphere during the 1850s. It implies that China is attempting to become the potential regional hegemon in the Pacific region. If China enjoys more relative gain that can challenge the US position, China can no longer tolerate the US projection of its power in the Asia-Pacific and will eventually exclude the US' presence in the Asia-Pacific. Therefore, Mearsheimer provides three possible ways to balance the rise of China. The first is a containment strategy; for instance, formulating an alliance against China. Second, is to slow down China's economic growth. Finally, the "roll-back" strategy which means to weaken China's influence by overthrowing pro-China regimes or fomenting internal trouble in China.<sup>15</sup> Although both President Obama and President Trump adopted different approaches in responding to the rise of China, both presidents aimed to maintain US leadership in the region. President Obama tried to incorporate China into the US-led liberal international order to ensure the US' leadership, whereas President Trump attempted to restrict China's geopolitical, economic, and military development. Therefore, it is worth discussing the change and continuity of the US Asia-Pacific policy from Obama to Trump.

Hence, from the elaboration of the theoretical discussion of Offensive Realism, a general proposition as follows emerges: *The more relative gains a regional hegemon enjoys, the more the regional hegemon restricts the advance of a rising power.* Based on this proposition, the following hypotheses will attempt to explain Obama and Trump's Asia-Pacific strategies.

Hypothesis 1: The more relative gain a regional hegemon enjoys, the more an existing power restricts the advance of a rising power by forming alliances.

Hypothesis 2: The more relative gain a regional hegemon enjoys, the

13 Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 158-159.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., 387.

more an existing power restricts the geo-political influence of a rising power.

Hypothesis 3: The more relative gain a regional hegemon enjoys, the more an existing power restricts the economic development of a rising power.

Hypothesis 4: The more relative gain a regional hegemon enjoys, the more an existing power promotes its values to a rising power.

### **Obama's "Rebalancing Asia" Strategy**

#### *Goals of Obama's "Rebalancing Asia" Strategy*

In response to the change of the strategic environment in the Asia-Pacific, especially the rise of China, the Obama Administration put more attention on handling challenges in the Asia-Pacific region by launching the "Rebalancing Asia" Strategy. The Obama administration aimed to: (1) amplify the alliances and security partnerships in the Asia-Pacific; (2) engage intensively with the emerging power centers in the region; (3) participate in multilateral institutions and summits; (4) promote free trade; and (5) engage in a productive and constructive relationship with China.<sup>16</sup> The Obama Administration believed that the power competition between the US and China was inevitable. Nonetheless, policymakers of the administration wanted to avoid the self-fulfilling prophecy of the so-called "Thucydides Trap:" wherein which conflict and war between both the rising power and the existing power would be inescapable.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the Obama Administration believed that China and the US had common interests over global and regional issues, such as trade, environmental issues, and nuclear nonproliferation. Although the Obama Administration labelled China as a competitor, they looked for a "positive, constructive, comprehensive US-China relationship" and they adopted an engagement-oriented policy with China.<sup>18</sup>

16 "Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney, National Security Advisor Tom Donilon, and Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications Ben Rhodes," The White House, last modified November 19, 2011, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/19/press-briefing-press-secretary-jay-carney-national-security-advisor-tom->.

17 Aaron L. Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2011).

18 Jeffery A. Bader, *Obama and China's Rise: An Insider Account of America's Asia Strategy* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press).

*The Implementation of Obama's "Rebalancing Asia" Strategy*

First, the Obama Administration amplified the existing alliance system in the Asia-Pacific. The US alliance system in the Asia-Pacific maintains the US influence and presence in the region. By providing security guarantees to its Asian allies, such as troop deployment or intelligence sharing, the US can respond to threats and challenges with its allies immediately.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the US can mobilize its allies to address the challenges collectively.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, to amplify the US influence in Asia, the Obama administration committed to shifting 60 percent of its naval fleet to the Asia-Pacific until 2020.<sup>21</sup> In addition, it tried to consolidate the US alliance relationship with Asian allies. In 2014, the US extended the scope of Article 5 of the US-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security to the Senkaku/Diaoyutai Islands in response to China's military activities since 2012.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, after the North Korean nuclear test in 2016, the US decided to introduce the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system in South Korea.<sup>23</sup> Also, the US tried to formulate a trilateral alliance with Japan and South Korea. Nonetheless, this proposal failed due to South Korea's opposition.<sup>24</sup> The Obama Administration likewise amplified its power projection in Southeast

19 Challenges such as North Korea's missile threat, territorial disputes in the South China Sea, and terrorism in the region.

20 Jennifer Lind, "Keep, Toss, or Fix? Assessing U.S. Alliance in East Asia," in *Rethinking American National Security*, ed. Jeremi Suri and Benjamin Valention (Oxford University Press, 2016), 1-45.

21 "Remarks by National Security Advisor Tom Donilon--As Prepared for Delivery," The White House, last modified November 15, 2012, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/11/15/remarks-national-security-advisor-tom-donilon-prepared-delivery%3e>.

22 "Senkaku islands dispute escalates as China sends out patrol ships," *The Guardian*, 11 September, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/sep/11/senkaku-islands-china-patrol-ships>.

23 "Opportunities and Challenges in the U.S.-Japan and U.S.-Republic of Korea Alliances," U.S. Department of State, last modified March 4, 2014, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2014/03/222903.htm>.

24 Jong-Yun Bae and Ki-Jung Kim, "A South Korean Perspective: Seoul's 'Pragmatic' Road to Trilateral Co-operation," *Global Asia* 12, no.1 (Spring 2017): 20-23; Ryo Hinata-Yamaguchi, "Completing the US-Japan-Korea Alliance Triangle: Prospects and Issues in Japan-Korea Security Cooperation," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 28, no. 3, (September, 2016):383-402

Asia and Oceania. In 2014, both the US and the Philippines signed the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) that allows US forces to be deployed to the Philippines' military bases.<sup>25</sup> The US also deployed around 2,500 US troops in Darwin Port in Australia.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the US was able to enlarge its influence in the South China Sea and Oceania effectively.

Second, in the geo-political realm, the Obama Administration attempted to slowdown China's influence by resolving the South China Sea disputes. To address this issue, the administration adopted legal, diplomatic, and military means.<sup>27</sup> For a start, the Obama Administration required all parties to resolve disputes through peaceful and legal measures. When President Obama visited the Philippines in April 2014, he expressed his support of President Aquino III who filed a case concerning China's claim to the nine-dash line to the Permanent Court of Arbitration.<sup>28</sup> By using legal means, the US attempted to delegitimize China's claim related to the nine-dash line and its activities over the South China Sea. Also, Michael Fuchs, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, proposed the concept of "Freeze" during the Fourth Annual South China Sea Conference in July 2014. He required all parties to cease activities and actions that contributed to instability, stop all unilateral enforcement measures which damaged claimants' economic activities.<sup>29</sup> However, China and ASEAN states neglected the proposal as they actively constructed artificial islands in the South China Sea. Finally, facing China's military activities over the South China Sea, the Obama Administration conducted the Freedom of Navigation

25 Jim Wolf, "U.S. plans 10-month warship deployment to Singapore," *Reuters*, May 10, 2012, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-singapore-warship/u-s-plans-10-month-warship-deployment-to-singapore-idUSBRE84811E20120510>.

26 Caren Bohan and James Grubel, "Obama boosts U.S. military in Australia, reassures China," *Reuters*, November 16, 2011, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-australia/obama-boosts-u-s-military-in-australia-reassures-china-idUSTRE7AF0F220111116>.

27 Ely Ratner, "Course Advancing: How to Stop China's Maritime Advance." *Foreign Affairs* 96, no 4 (Jul/Aug 2017): 64-72.

28 "Remarks by President Obama and President Benigno Aquino III of the Philippines in Joint Press Conference," *The White House*, last modified April 28, 2014, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/04/28/remarks-president-obama-and-president-benigno-aquino-iii-philippines-joi>.

29 "Fourth Annual South China Sea Conference," *Department of State*, last modified July 11, 2014, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2014/07/229129.htm>.



Operation four times from 2015 in order to manifest its determination to ensure the freedom of navigation, safety and the open use of the South China Sea. In this operation, the US dispatched vessels and aircraft to patrol the disputed islands. In other words, the US wanted to send a signal to China that the US would enforce international law and that it was willing to protect its allies. The Obama Administration behaved circumspectly in their approach to resolving disputes in order to avoid escalating the tension on the South China Sea. Nonetheless, they behaved responsively rather than proactively in resolving the disputes. Even though their approach helped maintain stability in the South China Sea, they failed to constrain China's activities in the South China Sea.<sup>30</sup> Despite the verdict released by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in 2016 which rejected China's claim over the nine-dash line, China continues to implement militarization in the South China Sea.<sup>31</sup>

Third, in the economic realm, the Obama Administration attempted to maintain its influence in Asia by taking the lead in promoting regional integration in the Asia-Pacific. In 2013, the Obama Administration established a multilateral trade mechanism called the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). The Obama Administration aimed to: (1) promote free trade and a rule-based trade environment; (2) protect intellectual property rights and labor rights and; (3) require states to deregulate over enterprises in order to promote fair trade.<sup>32</sup> As Kurt Campbell argued, the Obama administration wanted to take the lead in promoting economic integration in the Asia-Pacific region by establishing the TPP. Furthermore, the US aimed to intensify the security ties with US allies by economic means. Regarding the relationship between the TPP and China, Takashi Terada, a Japanese scholar, argued that the TPP was an inclusive trade bloc that welcomed all states to join. Also, the high standard of regulations of the TPP did not target any state or party. All states needed to fulfill the entry requirements before entering

30 Da-jung Li, "U.S. South China Sea Policy during the Obama Administration." *Prospect Quarterly* 18, no 3, (July 2017): 41-84.

31 T. V. Paul, "Soft Balancing vs. Hard Clashes: The Risks of War over the South China Sea," *Global Asia* 13, No 3 (September 2018): 86-91.

32 Inkyo Cheong, "Beyond the Spaghetti Bowl: The TPP and the Quest for East Asian Regionalism." *Global Asia* 8, No 1 (Spring 2013): 60-70 and; Robert D. Backwill and Jennifer M. Harris, *War by Other Means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 180-184.

into the TPP.<sup>33</sup> However, Wang Yong, a Chinese scholar, argued that the US aimed to achieve its geo-political and geo-economic interests by promoting US-led economic integration, trying to constrain China's development. He argued that the US aimed to marginalize China by setting up high standard requirements that the Chinese government had found difficult to meet immediately. For instance, the protection of environment, intellectual property, and the reduction of the role played by state-owned companies.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, he argued that the US attempted to marginalize China as an exclusive economic bloc in order to ensure its hegemonic position.<sup>35</sup>

President Obama wanted to take the lead in promoting economic integration in the Asia-Pacific region, thereby ensuring the US leadership in the region. It is undeniable that the TPP was an inclusive trade bloc that did not have any provision to prohibit a specific state to participate. Nevertheless, the US aimed to balance China indirectly by setting up a high standard of entry requirements for the TPP since China took time to fulfill those requirements when Beijing wanted to join it. Also, in his work, Kurt Campbell argued that the TPP served as a tool for the US to bolster strong security ties with US allies.<sup>36</sup> In other words, the Obama Administration aimed to secure US leadership in Asia by promoting economic integration and indirectly balancing China in the economic realm. The Obama Administration managed to reduce the economic interdependence between China and the member states of the TPP by promoting economic integration within the organization. Therefore, the US expected that China would be unable to increase its influence through its economic statecraft.<sup>37</sup> In other words, the Obama Administration increase its influence by gathering its economic allies, thereby isolating China from the US-led economic integration project for ensuring its position in the region.

Finally, in the political realm, the Obama Administration managed to establish a "constructive partnership" with China. The Obama Administration found that China's power acceleration since 2008 posed as a challenge to the

33 Takashi Terada. "It's China's Choice to Join In or Stay Out," *Global Asia* 8, no 1, (March 2013): 57-59.

34 Wang Yong, "The Politics of the TPP Are Plain: Target China." *Global Asia* 8, no 1, (Spring 2013): 54-56.

35 Ibid.

36 Kurt M. Campbell, *The Pivot: The Future of American Statecraft in Asia* (New York: Twelve, 2016).

37 Ibid.

US hegemonic position and its dominance in the international order; power competition and distrust developed between the US and China.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, policymakers in the US wanted to avoid triggering a large-scale conflict with China. Furthermore, they believed that both China and the US had common interests on various issues, for instance, trade, environmental protection, and nuclear nonproliferation.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, to reduce the possibilities of triggering a conflict, the Obama Administration saw China as a potential partner for the US to address those issues. As a result, they tried to promote cooperation with China by adopting an engagement policy. Following the logic of the engagement policy, the Obama Administration attempted to invite China to participate in global governance and tried to shape China's policy choices to align with US interests and the existing international order. As a result, it reduced the possibilities of China's intention to challenge the US position.<sup>40</sup> In addition, the Obama administration launched the annual US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue to address issues that both sides needed to face. Both Kennedy Libenthal and Wang Jisi believed that when there was more communication between the two countries, both would be more likely to enlarge their common interests and reduce the likelihood of conflict.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the Obama Administration attempted to promote liberal values in China. For example, President Obama expressed US support for the Occupied Central Movement (Umbrella Movement) in Hong Kong.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, Obama's support of Hong Kong was symbolic and did not have significance to the movement. Moreover, it triggered China's dissatisfaction with the US since Beijing believed the US was intervening in China's domestic affairs.<sup>43</sup> In addition, they worried that the promotion of liberal values in Hong Kong impaired China's regime

38 Kenneth Libenthal and Wang Jisi, *Addressing US-China Strategic Distrust* (Washington DC: John L. Thornton China Centre at Brookings Institution), No. 4, March 2012, [http://yahuwshua.org/en/Resource-584/0330\\_china\\_lieberthal.pdf](http://yahuwshua.org/en/Resource-584/0330_china_lieberthal.pdf)

39 Thomas J. Christensen, *The China Challenge: Shaping the Choices of a Rising Power* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2015).

40 Ibid.

41 Kenneth Libenthal and Wang Jisi, *Addressing US-China Strategic Distrust*.

42 "Remarks by President Obama at the University of Queensland," The White House, last modified November 15, 2014, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/11/15/remarks-president-obama-university-queensland>.

43 Lesley Wroughton, Arshad Mohammed, "China tells foreign countries not to meddle in Hong Kong," *Reuters*, October 1, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hongkong-china-usa/china-tells-foreign-countries-not-to-meddle-in-hong-kong-idUSKCN0HQ4ET20141001>.

survival. As a result, the Chinese government tried to tighten its control on the society to blockade liberal values from entering China. Above all, facing the rise of China, the Obama Administration launched its “Rebalancing Asia” strategy to ensure the US’ leadership position in the Asia-Pacific. Rather than checking the power acceleration of China directly, the Obama Administration adopted balancing tactics (both internal and external) to enlarge the US’ influence. Alliance behavior and Obama’s South China Sea policy help support hypotheses 1 and hypothesis 2. Meanwhile, in the economic realm, the establishment of the TPP aimed to indirectly balance China’s economic influence while simultaneously ensuring the US’ power by economic means, which helps to support hypothesis 3. Finally, in the political realm, the Obama Administration tried to promote liberal values to China. Even though this was done in a symbolic way, this engagement policy still supports hypothesis 4.

### **Trump’s “Indo-Pacific” Strategy**

#### *Goals of Trump’s “Indo-Pacific” Strategy*

When President Trump came into office, he found it difficult to address two pressing issues that impaired the US hegemonic position. First was the power acceleration of China that sought to override the US leadership in the Asia-Pacific region. Another problem was that the power entrenchment during the previous administrations had caused the decline of US power. Therefore, the Trump Administration tried to ensure the US’ position by countering China more actively and passing its burdens to US allies. The Trump administration considered China as the primary threat to the United States that needed to be addressed<sup>44</sup>; the administration labeled China as a “Revisionist Power” that attempted to displace the US leadership, thereby reshaping the existing order.<sup>45</sup> China managed to establish a “Sino-centric order” that fostered economic interdependence with its neighboring states. Due to their economic interdependence, China exercised its economic statecraft to pressure its neighboring states to comply with China’s will.<sup>46</sup> On the one hand, the Trump Administration believed the rise of China undermined the US as the leader.

44 Bob Woodward, *Fear: Trump in the White House* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), 298.

45 “2017 National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” *The White House*, accessed May 1, 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905-2.pdf>.

46 Jennifer Lind, “Life in China Asia: What Regional Hegemony Would Look Like,” *Foreign Affairs* 97, no.2 (March/April 2018): 71-82

As Oriana Skylar Mastro argues, China attempted to “displace” the US’ leadership position rather than “replace” it; China attempted to override US leadership through a dual-track approach. Beijing participated in the existing international institutions to enlarge its influence, and, in the meantime, it established its own multilateral institutions that attempt to counterbalance the US influence.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, to preserve US leadership, policymakers in the U.S. tried various means to restrict the power acceleration of China. On the other hand, President Trump criticized Obama’s generosity to the U.S. allies that undermined US interests. The Trump Administration found it burdensome to provide security guarantees to its allies who only received US protection without sharing the US’ burden. Therefore, when President Trump took office, he did not allow its allies to take US support for granted; he required its allies to invest more into their national and regional security.<sup>48</sup> In addition, he looked for cooperation between allies that had “a fair share of the burden of responsibility to protect against common threats.”<sup>49</sup>

### *The Implementation of Trump’s “Indo-Pacific” Strategy*

To begin with, President Trump required the US allies to bear more responsibilities to sustain the alliance. He believed that the US provided security guarantee to its allies, such as NATO members and South Korea. However, since they did nothing to contribute to the alliance and regional security, President Trump believed that this situation was unfair to the US. In this case, South Korea was one of the buck-catchers; the Trump Administration required South Korea to contribute more to the US-ROK alliance. President Trump disliked that South Korea took the US’ economic interests and military support for granted. In addition, Trump believed that Seoul’s policy towards North Korea was feckless in keeping North Korea’s aggression in check. Instead, it exacerbated it. Because of that, President Trump held a dubious view over the

47 Oriana Skylar Mastro, “The Stealth Superpower: How China Hid its Global Ambitions,” *Foreign Affairs* 98, no 1 (January/February 2019): 31-39.

48 Randall Schweller, “Three Cheers for Trump’s Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 5 (September/October 2018): 133-143.

49 The Department of Defense, 2019 Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region (United States, 2019), <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF>

value of deploying THAAD missiles and US troops in South Korea.<sup>50</sup> Not only did President Trump request South Korea to pay more for the maintenance of US military facilities in South Korea, but he also canceled the Ulchi-Freedom Guardian Military Exercise after the Trump-Kim summit in June 2018.<sup>51</sup> Trump's buck-passing tactic to South Korea triggered Seoul's abandonment fear. Although the Moon Jae-in government consolidated the alliance relationship with the US, it tried to enhance South Korea's defense ability to alleviate the abandonment risk. For instance, they tried to develop next-generation submarines, and missile systems.<sup>52</sup> Through the buck-passing approach, President Trump pushed South Korea to enhance its defense capability which helped reduce the US burden in handling the threat of North Korea. Therefore, the US was able to more effectively handle other challenges in the region.

Although President Trump required the US allies to bear more responsibility for their security, Trump attempted to recruit potential partners to join its "Indo-Pacific" strategy. President Trump managed to build an "ambitious partnership" with India to create the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific region."<sup>53</sup> Due to the territorial disputes and India's dubious attitude to China's One Belt One Road Initiative, India became more vigilant of China's economic and military activities in South Asia.<sup>54</sup> Due to that, both the US and India had a chance for closer cooperation. For instance, the US shared real-

50 Victor Cha, "The Unintended Consequences of Success: U.S. Retrenchment from Korea," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 31, no.2 (June 2019): 165-191.

51 Ankit Panda, "US, South Korea Announce Suspension of 2018 Ulchi-Freedom Guardian Military Exercise," *The Diplomat*, June 19, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/06/us-south-korea-announce-suspension-of-2018-ulchi-freedom-guardian-military-exercise/>.

52 Er-Win Tan, Jae-Jeok Park, and Tomohiko Satake, "Security Hedging Strategies of U.S. Allies and Partners in the Era of Trump: The ROK, Japan and Singapore as Case Studies," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, 32, no 2 (June 2020): 163-184; Joon Hyung Kim, "Deterrence, Alliance and Peace-Keeping: An Ambivalent Peace Initiative," *Global Asia* 14, no.2 (June 2019): 34-39.

53 "Defining Our Relationship with India for the Next Century: An Address by U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson," *CSIS*, October 18, 2017, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/defining-our-relationship-india-next-century-address-us-secretary-state-rex-tillerson>.

54 Shivshankar Menon. "League of Nationalism: How Trump and Modi Refashioned the U.S.-Indian Relationship," *Foreign Affairs* 99, no 5, (September 2020): 132-139.

time intelligence related to China's and Pakistan's military deployment and activities with India<sup>55</sup> and provided advanced weaponry to India.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, by consolidating cooperation between the US and India in the security aspect, the Trump administration tried to work with India to counterbalance China's growing influence in South Asia and Indian Ocean.<sup>57</sup> Other than consolidating the relationship with India, the Trump Administration engaged with Taiwan because of its determination to counter China. The US avoids recognizing Taiwan formally for the sake of preventing the risk of entrapment, however, the Trump Administration did consolidate cooperation with Taiwan.<sup>58</sup> The Trump Administration enacted three major pro-Taiwan acts that aimed to enhance the relationship with Taiwan, include Taiwan in the "Indo-Pacific" Strategy, and strengthen Taiwan's international presence.<sup>59</sup> In the military realm, the US sold advanced weaponry to Taiwan. The value of arms sale to Taiwan saw a four-fold increase from USD\$2.2 billion in July 2019 to USD\$8 billion after a month.<sup>60</sup> In other words, by amplifying the relationship with Taiwan, the Trump Administration aimed to balance China's influence in the across-Taiwan Strait.

Second, in the geo-political realm, the Trump Administration tried to reduce tension on the Korean Peninsula. President Trump adopted his "Maximum Pressure Plus Engagement" policy toward North Korea, which

55 Alyssa Ayres, "The Economic Times. Seven reasons why COMCASA is so important for India," *Council on Foreign Relations*, September 7, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/what-next-us-india-military-ties>.

56 When President Trump visited in India in February 2020, he sold \$3 billion worth of military equipment, including 24 SeaHawk helicopters with Hellfire missiles and six Apache helicopters. See: Steve Holland and Aftab Ahmed, "After raucous welcome in India, Trump clinches \$3 billion military equipment sale," *Reuters*, February 25, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-usa-trump/after-raucous-welcome-in-india-trump-clinches-3-billion-military-equipment-sale-idUSKCN20J0J5>.

57 Robert D. Blackwill and Ashley J. Tellis, "The India Dividend: New Delhi Remains Washington's Best Hope in Asia," *Foreign Affairs* 98, no 5, (September/October 2019): 173-183.

58 Eric Heginbotham and Rajan Menon, "Taiwan's Balancing Act," *National Interest*, 160, (March 2019): 22-29.

59 The administration approved three major pro-Taiwan acts, they are: (1) Taiwan Travel Act of 2017; (2) Asia Reassurance Initiative Act of 2018, and (3) Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act of 2019.

60 "US risks China's anger after sealing \$8bn deal to sell Taiwan 66 fighter jets," *The Guardian*, 21 August, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/21/us-taiwan-8bn-deal-66-f16-fighter-jets-china>.

is similar to the logic of the “roll-back” strategy that Mearsheimer proposed. However, instead of seeking “regime change” in North Korea, President Trump looked for a policy change.<sup>61</sup> The administration tried to imitate the path of Vietnam. In other words, the Kim family would maintain its position as the ruling power to North Korea. Meanwhile, both gradually established a closer connection.<sup>62</sup> While this approach did not resolve North Korea’s missile threat, North Korea did not conduct a nuclear test after the Singapore summit. In addition, President Trump focused on handling other agenda items such as trade issues with China.<sup>63</sup> Apart from moderating North Korea’s missile threats, the Trump Administration attempted to formulate a quadrilateral security framework that included Japan, Australia, and India. There were some reasons that the Trump Administration tried to incorporate them into the Quad framework. First, they are geo-politically significant as major powers in the region. Second, they understood the importance of maintaining the “free and open Indo-Pacific.”<sup>64</sup> As a result, when the Trump administration included them in the framework, it helped increase the US influence by solidifying the US relationship with its Asian partners. The formulation of a quadrilateral security framework commenced with ministerial level of Quadrilateral Consultations that helped promote cooperation.<sup>65</sup> However, the US maintained the existing alliance system and solidified the partnership with the US’ Asian partners, rather than formulating a multilateral alliance in Asia.<sup>66</sup>

Third, in the economic realm, President Trump tried to slow down China’s economic development by starting a trade war in 2018. The trade war tried to resolve the trade imbalance between China and the US.

61 Jina Kim and John K. Waeden, “Limiting North Korea’s Coercive Nuclear Leverage,” *Survival* 62, No.1 (February/ March 2020), pp. 31-38.

62 Harry J. Kazianis, “Fire and Flattery,” *National Interest*, 161: 20-27.

63 Kuo-cheng Chang, “The Relationship between China and North Korea after the Trump-Kim Summit: A Realist Perspective,” *Prospect Journal* 20 (October 2018): 39-60.

64 The Department of Defense, *2019 Indo-Pacific Strategy Report*.

65 Ibid.

66 Ping-Kuei Chen, “The Prospects of the U.S. Alliance System in Asia: Managing from the Hub,” *Issues & Studies*, 56, Issue 03 (September 2020): 1-26.



Moreover, it also attempted to ensure the US' national security.<sup>67</sup> After the Trump Administration had launched the Section 301 investigations related to China's trade practice and imposed tariffs against Chinese products such as steel and aluminum in March 2018,<sup>68</sup> they prohibited China from obtaining technological products from the US. For instance, American firms were not allowed to sell telecom equipment to ZTE. In addition, the Bureau of Industry and Security included Huawei on the "Entity List" for the sake of national security concerns.<sup>69</sup> The Trump administration further attempted to prevent Chinese firms from obtaining "dual-use" products because the administration was concerned about China using those products to develop its military capability.<sup>70</sup> After the trade war, friction between China and the US remained tense until the trade negotiation in January 2020. To cease the negative impacts caused by the trade war, both sides agreed to reach an agreement in December 2019 and signed the phase one trade agreement in January 2020. Before starting the phase two trade negotiations, China was required to meet the following criteria: (1) purchase US goods and services, for instance, manufactured goods, agricultural and seafood products, and energy products of no less than USD\$200 billion; (2) require its firms to comply with intellectual property, including to cease forced technological transfers and (3) cease competitive devaluations. In addition, the US wished to verify whether China fulfilled the requirements of the trade agreement

67 "Findings Of The Investigation Into China's Acts, Policies, And Practices Related To Technology Transfer, Intellectual Property, And Innovation Under Section 301 of The Trade Act of 1974," Office Of The United States Trade Representative, last modified March 22, 2018, <https://ustr.gov/sites/default/files/Section%20301%20FINAL.PDF>.

68 Office Of the United States Trade Representative, "Findings Of The Investigation Into China's Acts, Policies, And Practices Related To Technology Transfer, Intellectual Property, And Innovation Under Section 301 of The Trade Act of 1974."

69 "Entity List," Bureau of Industry and Security, accessed 17 August 2020, <https://www.bis.doc.gov/index.php/policy-guidance/lists-of-parties-of-concern/entity-list>.

70 Darren Lim, "The US, China and 'Technology War'," *Global Asia* 14, No. 1 (March 2019): 8-13.; Alexandra Alper and Idrees Ali, "Exclusive: Trump administration says Huawei, Hikvision backed by Chinese military," *Reuters*, June 25, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china-military-exclusive-idUSKBN23V309>

by setting up a dispute resolution system.<sup>71</sup> In other words, the Trump Administration doubted whether China would fulfill its commitment sincerely.

Finally, in the political realm, President Trump showed his indifference to the promotion of liberal values abroad.<sup>72</sup> However, the administration used the issue of Hong Kong as a bargaining chip to counter China after the anti-extradition law movement in 2019. Although former security advisor John Bolton criticized Trump's reluctance in rephending China over the suppression of the movement in Hong Kong in June 2019, President Trump did sign acts related to Hong Kong.<sup>73</sup> This is because Hong Kong's issues involved US national security and interests, pushing the Trump Administration to action in an attempt to prevent sensitive US technology in Hong Kong from falling into China's hands.<sup>74</sup> As such, Trump signed the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act on November 27, 2019. This act consists of three components: (1) to verify Hong Kong's firms evade both US export control laws and UN sanctions;<sup>75</sup> (2) to verify whether the Hong Kong SAR government and the Chinese government are upholding the commitments from the Sino-British Joint Declaration that ensure civil rights and freedom in Hong Kong and (3) to sanction officials in Hong Kong and China who undermine human rights and Hong Kong self-autonomy. Eventually, after the Hong Kong National Security Law passed on June 30, 2020, the Trump Administration revoked US special treatment to Hong Kong. In other words, the Trump Administration did not consider Hong Kong as a separate entity from China. Without this treatment, China found it difficult to obtain sensitive technological products through Hong Kong; it also helped restrict China's

71 "Agreement between the United States of America and the People's Republic of China," United States Trade Representative, last modified December 12, 2019, <https://ustr.gov/sites/default/files/US-China-Agreement-Fact-Sheet.pdf>.

72 Barry R. Posen. "The Rise of Illiberal Hegemony: Trump's Surprising Grand Strategy," *Foreign Affairs* 97, no 2 (March/April 2018): 20-27.

73 John Bolton, *The Room Where It Happened: A White House Memoir* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020).

74 According to the 1992 Hong Kong Policy Act, the U.S. treats Hong Kong and China separately, Hong Kong enjoys special treatments in terms of trade, tariff and the import of sensitive technology from the U.S. See: ORLC. Chapter 66—United States-Hong Kong Policy. <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim/@title22/chapter66&edition=prelim>.

75 "U.S. Congress. H.R.3289 - Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act of 2019," *Congress.gov*, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/3289>.

economic and military development. Namely, security concerns were the primary concern for the Trump Administration to take an active approach to respond to the social movement.<sup>76</sup> Above all, facing the rise of China, the Trump administration launched its “Indo-Pacific” Strategy to ensure the US leadership position in the Asia-Pacific. Unlike President Obama, President Trump adopted a more direct approach against China. To enlarge the US influence, President Trump required US allies such as South Korea to contribute more to the alliance. In the meantime, he engaged with India and Taiwan to enlarge the US influence in the region. Trump’s alliance behavior helps support hypothesis 1. Moreover, President Trump tried to limit China’s influence in the geopolitical realm; he attempted to reduce China’s leverage on the Korean Peninsula. Meanwhile, President Trump promoted Quadrilateral cooperation with Japan, Australia, and India, mobilizing them to respond to rising China collectively, thus supporting hypothesis 2. Also, in the economic realm, President Trump triggered a trade war against China in order to restrict China’s economic development, supporting hypothesis 3. Finally, Trump’s policy to Hong Kong does support hypothesis 4, but the result is conflicting. The administration tried to protect Hong Kong’s civil rights and liberty, but the main purpose of this intervention was due to security concerns.

### **Comparison between Obama’s and Trump’s Asia-Pacific Strategy**

Since President Trump’s took office, he proposed a term called “Indo-Pacific” and gradually replaced this with the term “Asia-Pacific.” In Trump’s strategy, he attempted to consolidate the ties with allies and India, thereby confronting the existing challenges that the US needed to face. Although President Trump’s strategy attempted to reject Obama’s approach, Trump’s “Indo-Pacific” strategy preserved some elements from Obama’s “Rebalancing Strategy” because both focused on responding to

76 Jie Liu and Congyan Cai, “From Hong Kong Policy Act of 1992 to Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act of 2019: The Evolution of the US’s Hong Kong Policy in the Context of the Rise of China,” *Journal of East Asia & International Law* 13, No.1 (May 2020) :7-20.

the rise of China.<sup>77</sup> The following section will compare the two strategies.

To begin with, both Obama and Trump's strategies aimed to maintain US leadership in the Asia-Pacific. Nonetheless, the measures they adopted were different. President Obama adopted a strategy called "Liberal Hegemony" that John J Mearsheimer proposed. The Obama Administration attempted to promote multilateral mechanisms to the Asia-Pacific region. In the meantime, he tried to incorporate China into the U.S-led international order.<sup>78</sup> Obama believed that if China were a contributor to the liberal international order, it would help the US ensure its leadership. By contrast, Trump's "Indo-Pacific" strategy showed his indifference to the "liberal international order." The Trump Administration explicitly indicated that the US should adopt "principled realism" to handle strategic challenges in the "Indo-Pacific" region.<sup>79</sup> In other words, the Trump Administration placed security issues ahead of the promotion of liberal values. The Trump Administration enhanced the US' military capabilities and projection, consolidated the alliance system, and extended partnerships with other "Indo-Pacific" States. By mobilizing the US allies and partners, the US could more effectively meet the challenges in the "Indo-Pacific" region. In addition, Trump preferred adopting bilateralism, because he believed the culprit eroding the US' bargaining power was multilateralism.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, the US withdrew from several multilateral mechanisms such as the TPP during the Trump Administration and launched negotiations with its allies and rivals bilaterally.

Second, regarding the alliance behavior between both administrations, they mobilized the US allies to address problems in the region collectively. However, the two administrations treated the US allies in Asia in different ways. The Obama Administration provided more military aid to traditional allies and new partners. For instance, the Obama

77 Renato Cruz De Castro. "From Rebalancing to Competition: The Trump Administration's Grand Strategy for the Indo-Pacific Strategy," *Tamkang Journal of International Affairs* 22, no 4 (April 2019): 1-50; Muhammad Saeed. "From the Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific: Expanding Sino-U.S. Strategic Competition," *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies* 3, no 4 (Winter 2017): 499-512; and Bilahari Kausikan. "Asia in the Trump Era: From Pivot to Peril." *Foreign Affairs* 96, no 3 (May/June 2017): 146-152.

78 Kurt M. Campbell and Ely Ratner. "The China Reckoning: How Beijing Defied American Expectations," *Foreign Affairs* 97, no 2 (March/April 2018): 60-70.

79 The White House, "2017 National Security Strategy of the United States of America."

80 Schweller, "Three Cheers for Trump's Foreign Policy."

Administration consolidated the US-ROK alliance by amplifying the trade relationship with South Korea, signing the US-Korea Free Trade Agreement (KORUS FTA) with South Korea in 2011. By contrast, President Trump considered its allies as buck-catchers despite trying to engage with potential partners. President Trump expected US allies to bear more responsibility in maintaining the alliance relationship with the US and expected their trade policy needed to favor the US' interests. For instance, President Trump required its allies such as South Korea to bear more for their national defense.

Third, while both Obama and Trump considered China as a competitor of the US, their approaches were different. Although President Obama considered China as a competitor, he looked for “the positive, constructive, comprehensive US-China relationship.” The Obama Administration tried to engage with China by narrowing the “strategic distrust.” The South China Sea dispute was the issue that bought the biggest chafing.<sup>81</sup> By contrast, the Trump Administration regarded China as a “real enemy” of the United States.<sup>82</sup> The Trump Administration believed China to be a “Revisionist Power” that caused disarray in the region.<sup>83</sup> To preserve the existing international order and the US leadership, the Trump Administration tried to restrict the rise of China. In military and strategic aspects, the Trump Administration not only sought to launch the Quadrilateral cooperation with Japan, India and Australia, but also sought to strengthen its ties with Taiwan in order to blockade China's Belt and Road Initiatives and power acceleration in the geo-political realm—which we can consider as external balancing. Also, President Trump tried to launch a technological war against China to stagnate China's technological and military advancement. Overall, the continuity of both strategies launched by President Obama and President Trump was to ensure the US leadership in the region and to respond to the rise of China. However, Trump's “Indo-Pacific” strategy rejected some elements of Obama's “Rebalancing Asia” strategy that rendered some changes to the US Asia-Pacific policy. For instance, President Trump rejected multilateralism, condition-free support to the US allies, and an engagement policy with China.

81 Li, “U.S. South China Sea Policy during the Obama Administration.”

82 Woodward, *Fear*, 298.

83 The Department of Defense, *2019 Indo-Pacific Strategy Report*.

## Conclusion

To conclude, the changing environment in the Asia-Pacific was the pivotal factor for the changing policy of the US Asia-Pacific policy for both Obama to Trump. The more China advanced in the region, the more active the US was in response to the rise of China. Although the Obama Administration adopted a moderate approach in confronting the rise of China, the administration became more hawkish when China became more self-assertive over the South China dispute. Besides, Trump's "Indo-Pacific" strategy was more explicit in setting up a blockade to China's geopolitical advancement, and to stagnate China's economic, technological, and military development. For the development of the US Asia-Pacific policy from Obama to Trump, international pressure was the pivotal factor in the changing US Asia-Pacific policy. The discussion of Obama's and Trump's alliance behavior in the Asia-Pacific region helps to verify hypothesis 1: the more relative gain a regional hegemon enjoys, the more an existing power restricts the advance of a rising power by forming alliances. Also, Obama's South China Sea policy and Trump's North Korea policy and the formation of the "Quad" help to prove hypothesis 2: the more relative gain a regional hegemon enjoys, the more an existing power restricts the geo-political influence of a rising power. Furthermore, the establishment of the TPP and Trump's trade war against China seems to help verify hypothesis 3: the more relative gain a regional hegemon enjoys, the more an existing power restricts the economic development of a rising power. Finally, although US policy towards Hong Kong under the two administrations did not play an important role in the US foreign policy agenda, overall the US policy toward Hong Kong does support hypothesis 4 (the more relative gain a regional hegemon enjoys, the more an existing power promotes its values to a rising power).

The discussion of the US Asia-Pacific policy from President Obama to President Trump helps support these four hypotheses, and in turn, proves the general hypothesis extracted from the elaboration of John Mearsheimer's Offensive realism as follows: the more relative gain a regional hegemon enjoys, the more the regional hegemon restricts the advance of a rising power. Therefore, Offensive realism helps to explain the US Asia-Pacific policy from Obama to Trump.