

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background

Having taken office on January 2017, Donald J. Trump is currently the 45<sup>th</sup> president of the United States (US). Throughout his campaign up to the moment he was elected, Donald Trump vocally introduced “American First” policy by assessing all existing agreements and cooperation—including but not limited to Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and Paris Agreement. Donald Trump once said, “As we rebuild American strength and confidence at home, we are also restoring our strength and standing abroad”.<sup>1</sup>

In general, some his statements were alarming to most of the United States’ allies and friends, and Southeast Asia (SEA) was no exception. In fact, Donald Trump’s first act was withdrawing the US from TPP—with Brunei, Malaysia, and Vietnam included.

There are many lenses to see how the President exercises his foreign policy agendas—SEA acts as one of the lenses to assess the US approach in dealing with issues in Asia. The US engagement in maintaining stability and security in SEA is not a new phenomenon as it began years ago. The US has been using different approaches to deepen its relationship with SEA countries; from engaging multilaterally to bilaterally; from militarily to diplomatically.

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<sup>1</sup> “President Donald J. Trumps Foreign Policy Puts America First.” The White House. Accessed February 27, 2019. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trumps-foreign-policy-puts-america-first/>.

Southeast Asia role in the US foreign policy has been a roller-coaster ride since the Vietnam War and Cold War started. According to Hang Nguyen in his 2016 article “The Obama Administration and Southeast Asia: Dynamics of a New Engagement”, Ronald Reagan during his presidency mentioned that developing countries, particularly Southeast Asian countries, were irrelevant during Cold War only act as battlegrounds between the US and the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> The notion to fight against communism was the trigger behind the US government engagement in Southeast Asia and signified the beginning of its military presence in the region.

The US military bases in Thailand and the Philippines indicated the importance of Southeast Asia to the US interest in containing the spread of communism in the region—and a projection of the US defense commitment in Southeast Asia and beyond.<sup>3</sup> However, it was not long after the Vietnam War ended and domestic political pressure that the Nixon doctrine occurred. Proclaimed that the US will honor the commitments and aid, henceforth the US expected its allies to provide their own defense.<sup>4</sup> Yet, the stability in Asia was still at stake considering the Soviet Union presence in Afghanistan and Vietnam.

The fall of the Soviet Union and their discontinuity to support Vietnam—which later required the Vietnam military to withdraw from Cambodia manifest

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<sup>2</sup> Nguyen, H. (2016). The Obama Administration and Southeast Asia: Dynamics of a New Engagement. *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs*, 29, 39-56. Retrieved March 23, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Fifield, Russell H. n.d. “The Reagan Administration and Southeast Asia.” *Southeast Asian Affairs* 2018. pg. 43

<sup>4</sup> The Nixon Doctrine

the threat in Southeast Asia was fully contained. The prominent change in the US foreign policy in Southeast Asia occurred after the Cold War ended when presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton changed their foreign policy direction from security to economic matter.<sup>5</sup>

Both presidents seemed unprepared with the huge results that the US achieved in the region, remembering the US experienced a unipolar system. Consequently, the foreign policy had no clear objectives until President George H. W. Bush connected the dots between the US military presence in the region and a new economic market in Asia.<sup>6</sup> President Clinton took the same path as his predecessor, as both presidents referred Southeast Asia as a peaceful region of energetic economic growth. The significant difference between the two presidents was the involvement of the multilateral institutions such as Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) that was increasing during the Clinton administration.<sup>7</sup>

The economic relations between the US and Southeast Asian countries were increasing until it reached their nadir of partnership when the Asian Economic crisis hit in 1998. The Clinton administration had to withstand the crisis as the US economy was impacted due to the fact that some of its partners in Southeast Asia were coping with the Asian crisis—such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines. Therefore, the US government along with International

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<sup>5</sup> Nguyen, H. (2016). The Obama Administration and Southeast Asia: Dynamics of a New Engagement. *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs*, 29, 39-56. Retrieved March 23, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Mauzy, Diane K., and Brian L. Job. n.d. "Limited Engagement after Years of Benign Neglect." *US Policy in Southeast Asia*.  
[https://sites.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/Acrobat/Burma\\_Mauzy\\_Job.pdf](https://sites.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/Acrobat/Burma_Mauzy_Job.pdf). pg. 624-625

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Monetary Fund (IMF) helped the Asian countries to overcome the crisis by lending millions of dollars to pay all debts as it was in line with the US interest to enter the Asian Market.<sup>8</sup> The US economic policy continued until the new elected President George W. Bush took into office in 2001.

At first, many people predicted that President George W. Bush would have a different view towards the international system. During the campaign and until he got elected—he was criticizing President Clinton’s policy and saw a different approach to engage with the world. His view was rapidly proven by the result of the catastrophic tragedy on the September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001—although it was not the only evidence of his approach in achieving the US interests. The US foreign policy objectives shifted from economic to security matters; and unitary action was needed to achieve the US interests.<sup>9</sup> The war on terror was the highlight of President George W. Bush foreign policy and was the milestone of Southeast Asia position as it became the major front in the US global war on terror.

Once again, the new-elect President Obama in 2009 changed the US approach in Asia—in particular Southeast Asia. Prioritizing the region by engaging in numerous conferences to increase its influence in the Asia-Pacific region; including Southeast Asia—known as ‘the US Pivot to Asia’.

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<sup>8</sup> Austin, Ian. 2009. “The Treasury of The United States of America And the Asian Financial Crisis: A Decade in Review.” *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 28 (2009): 50–51.

<sup>9</sup> Daalder, Ivo H., and James M. Lindsay. 2003. “The Bush Revolution: The Remaking of America’s Foreign Policy,” no. 2003 (May): 2.

Under President Obama, the US was the first non-Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) country to establish a permanent representative in the ASEAN Secretariat.<sup>10</sup> Not only engaged with Southeast Asian countries bilaterally but also maximized existing multilateral partnerships, and talks; namely the ARF, APEC, and ASEAN Plus summits to engage with Southeast Asian countries. Before President Obama's term ended, the idea of Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) occurred as a tangible action to increase its presence and engagement in Asia-Pacific. Additionally, referring to National Security Strategy 2015, it mentioned that the TPP is crucial towards the US efforts in Southeast Asia.

Currently, under President Trump, the US again has no vivid policy in Southeast Asia. However, two years after he took office, there were policies that direct and indirectly impact Southeast Asian countries. After the US withdrawal from TPP, the US changed its Pacific Command (PACOM) to Indo-Pacific Command as a new geopolitical strategy to balance China's power in the region and increase the importance of cooperation with countries in the region.<sup>11</sup> Economics and terrorism were some of the US interests as security incidents happened across Southeast Asia. The US deputy ambassador to Indonesia for instance, stated that the US government is ready to provide assistance in investigating the bombing incident and stood with the Indonesian government

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<sup>10</sup> Nguyen, H. (2016). The Obama Administration and Southeast Asia: Dynamics of a New Engagement. *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs*, 29, 42. Retrieved March 23, 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Scott, David. 2018. "The Indo-Pacific in US Strategy: Responding to Power Shifts." *Rising Powers Quarterly* 3 (2): 19–43.

in eradicating terrorism<sup>12</sup>—right after the suicide bomb attacks in East Java, Indonesia.

After knowing a brief history of the US engagement in Southeast Asia and considering the dynamic from each president. It would be an interesting topic to discuss in how President Trump achieves the US' objectives. There are major foreign policies conducted by President Trump, however, I would like to examine the US security foreign policy in Indo-Pacific and its implications to Southeast Asia. Thus, it is important for me as a scholar of Political Science and International Relations to offer a review and an analysis of the US security foreign policy in Indo-Pacific and its implications during President Trump presidency.

I would not discuss any further details about the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) position as a regional organization in this thesis, considering some of the ASEAN values enable each member states to formulate its position that will best serve for its national interests. Although, this thesis will not completely ignore the ASEAN position as it has a voice in the region. Instead, I would assess the position of Southeast Asian countries to understand its whereabouts in the great power race.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

Amid the political dynamics in Asia between the great powers and regional powers, this thesis would answer the following main questions and sub-questions:

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2018/05/16/us-ready-to-help-investigation-into-surabaya-bomb-attacks-envoy.html>

1. What is the US security foreign policy objectives in Indo-Pacific region?  
And how President Trump achieves the objectives?
2. What are the implications of the US security foreign policy objectives  
in Indo-Pacific towards Southeast Asia?

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

After President Trump published the National Security Strategy on 2017, it created a lot of debates on the US approach toward Southeast Asia—particularly Southeast Asia. A change of direction creates a new dynamic in Indo-Pacific (known before as Asia-Pacific). Therefore, this thesis has several objectives to be achieved in order to create a better understanding regarding President Trump's security foreign policy and Southeast Asia.

This thesis would examine the US security foreign policy objectives towards Indo-Pacific and later focus on policies that impact Southeast Asia. Also, to see the policy's direction as well as the utilization of various instruments through his security foreign policy for the past three years that is deemed as important to support the US's national strategic interests. Along with that, is also important to assess implications after three years of President Trump's presidency and analyze some of Southeast Asian countries response towards the US security foreign policy. Thus, I hope this thesis can bring a new perspective on how the US and Southeast Asia engage in the current political dynamic and come up with recommendations to maximize the US security foreign policy in the region.

### **1.4 Research Contribution**

I hope that this thesis will be able to contribute as further consideration for students, scholars, and relevant institutions to understand the US security foreign policy objectives in Indo-Pacific during Trump's presidency and how he is going to achieve it. This thesis will analyze the actions and policies that has been executed for the past two years to see the consequences in Southeast Asia caused by the US security foreign policy. In accordance with the National Security Strategy 2017 that Southeast Asia is considered as part of Indo-Pacific. Along with that, I hope this thesis will contribute to future study as reference to maximize the knowledge about Trump's security foreign policy objectives in Indo-pacific and its relations to Southeast Asia.

Therefore, as I examine and determine the US foreign policy objectives in Indo-Pacific which may include traditional security, and economics issues. This thesis will direct the discussion from domestic and regional perspective in order to explain the US and Southeast Asia countries' behavior that can be assessed from its current progress and prepare its projection for the future.

### **1.5 Structure of Writing**

This thesis is written based on a book style which consists of five chapters, which are:

#### **CHAPTER 1: Introduction**

In the first chapter, it provides the overall introduction and discusses the main topic of this thesis. Through a broad explanation on the topic this chapter discusses the history of the US involvement in Southeast Asia. Therefore, this



introduction provides the background of the topic as well as research questions to further analyzes and specify the research topic. Furthermore, it discusses the research objectives and explicates the research contributions and describes the structure of writing this thesis.

## **CHAPTER 2: Theoretical Framework**

In the second chapter I would like to narrow down or specify the research by doing literature review from academic journals. Therefore, the literature review is going to be divided into ten journals with five journals discuss the US security foreign policy towards Indo-Pacific and Southeast Asia; and the other five journals will discuss the Southeast Asian countries' engagement towards the US security foreign policy. The main theory of this thesis is Realism, I will also use several concepts to support the main theory which consist of foreign policy, geopolitics, the state, national interest, power, and great power.

## **CHAPTER 3: Research Methodology**

In the third chapter, it describes the procedures and methodology in writing thesis where the method used is qualitative-descriptive method. Therefore, the qualitative method is the most suitable as it provides deeper understanding and analysis to the topic. Qualitative approach would be the most appropriate approach to cover the thesis as it will focus on the coverage of the implication of the US security foreign policy. Descriptive method is also suitable for this thesis because it focuses on providing decent and accurate picture regarding the topic.

## **CHAPTER 4: Discussion and Analysis**

In the fourth chapter, it will discuss and analyze the research questions. This chapter will be divided into three main sub-chapters, namely: The Indo-Pacific Region in the US Security Framework; The US Foreign Policy on Indo-Pacific During President Trump's Presidency; and The Implications of The US Security Foreign Policy in Indo-Pacific to Southeast Asia countries. The sub-chapters will discuss and analyze the reasoning and supportive arguments to answer the research questions.

## **CHAPTER 5: Conclusion**

The last chapter will conclude the whole idea of the thesis by concluding the answers of the research questions, examining the US security foreign policy and assessing the responses of Southeast Asian countries. In addition to the details, I will also recommend some actions that might be put into consideration in the future studies.

