

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

The triumph of the Cold War has incredibly swift the world as a stage for the United States (US) in transforming its influence into an infrastructure for the real exercise of global power. As the influence expand globally, so does the role of US in assuming responsibility and accountability in safeguarding any crisis in the global order, notably with its military and economic superiority.¹ As noted by the US' Department of Defense that, “economic security is national security,” the potential crisis that now emerges in the Indo-Pacific region happens to involve both economic and security concerns.

Stretches from the east part of Indian Ocean to the west Pacific Ocean and connected by Strait of Malacca, Indo-Pacific has become the central area for maritime geopolitics, security, trade, and environment activities as it stands at the intersection of international trade, with around 32.2 million barrels of crude oil pass through annually and 40% of global exports come from the region. Southeast Asia in particular, sits at the dearest position in Indo-Pacific region.

With such geopolitical significance, US has played a major part in the region since the end of the Second World War, especially with its role as the “Chief

¹ Hsiao, Hsin-Huang Michael, and Cheng-yi Lin. Rise of China: Beijing's Strategies and Implications for the Asia-Pacific. London: Routledge. (2009): 202.

Pacific Power” and the global—and hence regional’s—preeminent security actor. However, after Indochina War, the US diverted its attention from Asia to other part of the world, such as the Middle East, as part of its War on Terror policy. Just as America’s vision and engagement were blurred by other specific issues and shifted its engagement from the region, China has also managed to become the region's dearest trading partner in recent years, adding to the US' urgency in the region.

Indeed, this hence explains the nature of the international system, which has always been regarded by the realists as an arena that is constantly in a competitive and conflictual situation. In order to achieve stability, the realist perceive that such thing can only be ensured by balance of power or equilibrium between states. This hence explains the establishment of Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) under Trump’s administration back in 2017, following Japan’s introduction to the strategy a year prior. That said, from the strategy’s establishment coming from both Japan and the US, it can be assumed that the international environment has now witnessed new geopolitical realities: the region has found itself to be at the theatre of China strategic competition, and the needs of Indo-Pacific strategy as a rebalancing strategy to the region.

Aside from Japan and the US, these geopolitical realities were also shared by other countries, as it can been from a meeting held by the Indo-Pacific “Quad” (United States, Japan, India and Australia) at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit in the following of Trump’s November 2017 FOIP introduction. Although the Quad is bonded by a shared sense of regional insecurity,

it has yet to share the same interpretation of the strategy. That said, this research will exclusively focus on the US' outlook of Indo-Pacific strategy.

However, the implementation of this strategy faces few challenges, the most significant of which are China's dominance and the region's waning trust towards the US. China's economic success in the region allows the Chinese government to play a greater political role by pursuing coercive foreign policy towards the region, that resulted in how the region has been struggling in articulating a response toward the Chinese's dominance.

South China Sea (SCS), for instance. Located within the grasp of Indo Pacific, the international' insecurity towards China's dominance began to intensify when China has been seen to build artificial islands across the sea to further expand its naval presence, while also began to exploit the natural resources within. However, being aggressive towards China in securing its security interests also means putting its economic interests at its stake. Therefore, this creates a strong urgency for the United States to project a strategy that is not merely designed to favor the United States but also can benefit Southeast Asia.

Therefore, this research aims to discuss the strategies that FOIP has to offer in order to strengthen the US position, amidst the region's high reliance on China on its commercial activity. This research also aims to prove how the United States endorses the FOIP strategy to strengthen its presence in Southeast Asia, as well as to keep the region's balance of power, using neorealism and neoclassical realism theories, followed by Foreign Policy, Geopolitics, and Balance of Power as the conceptual framework.

1.2. Research question

As indicated in the preceding background, the United States' Free and Open Indo-Pacific has become the United States' key Asia policy as a strategy to strengthen its position. Seeing this, this research recognizes the importance of addressing an in-depth analysis of the research.

With this in mind, the research will be developed from the following research questions. The research questions will be listed as follows:

1. In what way that the FOIP's strategy can help in strengthening the US' influence in Southeast Asia?
2. What strategies does the FOIP use to achieve the US' strategic interests in Southeast Asia?

1.3. Research Objectives

The research seeks to understand, and should be able to reach the objectives as follows:

1. To explore the prospect of US' FOIP strategy in strengthening the US position in the Southeast Asia,
2. To explore the prospect of US' FOIP strategy in influencing the dynamics of Chinese' dominance in the region.

1.4. Research Significance

The research along with its findings is made to highlight the strategy of the United States in strengthening US position in the region through a strategy that is made to benefit both parties. Furthermore, as it is crucial for the International Relations students to analyze any future trends of the international climate, the

outcome of this research will provide an analysis on how FOIP helps and can help the United States in advancing its position regionally and hence globally, amidst China's rise.

Hopefully, by understanding the analysis of this research's observation, readers will gain valuable insights to better grasp the condition of the current's geopolitics, as well as the significance in maintaining the Balance of Power.

1.5. Structure of Writing

The first chapter, the introduction, discusses the background of the research, the research question that will be addressed, the research objective, as well as the research significance. The second chapter elaborates the thesis's conceptual structure, which comprises literature reviews for the subject as well as literature reviews on theory and concepts in understanding the United States' Free and Open Indo Pacific. The methodology will be discussed in the third chapter, which encompasses the research approach, research method, data collection technique, and data analysis technique in gathering data and information for this dissertation. The fourth chapter is an analysis of the thesis as it offers all data and information, as well as an analysis, on the FOIP's role in strengthening the US position in Southeast Asia, notably amidst China's economic importance towards the region. The results from the research analysis in this chapter is aimed to answer the thesis's research question. At last, the fifth chapter concludes and summarizes the analyses of prior chapters, as it also discusses the significance of this thesis' findings and results for prospecting the regional's future trend.

However, before we get to the analysis, the following chapter marks as the beginning, as well as the first step in generating research findings, by examining prior studies and developing a theoretical framework and concepts, in order to develop a comprehensive analysis in answering the research questions, as well as achieving the research objectives.

