



Pattern of Alliances in South China Sea: An Analysis of US Rebalance Policy

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Submitted 10.02.2024

Accepted 03.06.2024

Published 30.06.2024

Volume No. 11

Issue No. I

ISSN (Online) 2414-8512

ISSN (Print) 2311-293X

DOI:

Keywords: Geo-Politics, Alliances, Hedging, Bandwagoning, Complex Interdependence, Threat Approximation

ABSTRACT

The prominence of America's 'Pacific turn' has not been reduced despite conflicts have conflagrated in the elsewhere regions. The US rebalance towards Asia policy has been in the limelight since its proclamation under Obama administration. This policy has been based upon forging alliances, especially with the countries of Asia Pacific. Though successive US administration brought few changes in policy, yet, none have downgraded the notion of China as challenging US preponderance. The realists argue that a state either balances with power or against threat, albeit bandwagon on occasions. The South China Sea dispute exist as territorial conflict between China and the littorals states, presents an ideal situation for the later states to form an alliance with USA. However, these littoral states have instead opted hedging behavior towards greater powers. This article measures this behavior deducing the fact that complex interdependence among states and associated threats effect the traditional alliance patterns.



Introduction

Alliance politics is back, or probably, it had never disappeared. States have been involved in politics of alliances since Peloponnesian war. The trend of forming alliances has not been changed, yet, the underlying dynamics of alliance politics keep evolving. The trend of clash between a rising power and status quo power also continues since then. United States has been pursuing policy of alliances, since it jettisoned isolationist position and signed Atlantic Charter in 1941. The alliance policy continues to be the cornerstone of US foreign policy in contemporary era. The same can be reaffirmed by the pronouncement of US Pivot to Asia or later Rebalance towards Asia, almost a decade and half ago. The policy since then had been under review by scholars of international politics and is deemed as incremental in shaping global politics. The Rebalance policy has been argued as China centric by many experts, while the US government call it as comprehensive policy made to articulate and achieve national interests. The Rebalance policy also has been referred so much as overtly militaristic in nature, forcing the Obama administration to revise its orientation. Sutter et al. (2013) stated the Obama administration adjusted its approach in late 2012, playing down the significance of military initiatives, emphasizing economic and diplomatic elements, and calling for closer U.S. engagement with China. This clarification reiterate Chinese importance within US strategic calculus, as well as, US policy makers to clear popular impressions associated with it.

As the political world is mostly established on realist suppositions, geo politics continue to dictate statecraft. The scholastic debates about contemporary period reflects a dichotomy of arguments, whether the world still is unipolar or it has become a multipolar. Therefore, there exist a consensus among many scholars that US-China bilateral equation hold the key for future in terms of global peace and security. A term 'Thucydides trap' was used to define the future of US-China relations and its possible trajectory.

Allison (2017) argued Thucydides's Trap is the severe structural stress caused when a rising power threatens to displace a ruling one. Either a conflicting course is taken by two of world's largest economies and military powers, or not, a lot becomes at stake due to the actions taken by both USA and China. Scholars of international politics have warned of growing complexities in US-China relations, casting doubts over a peaceful coexistence. Among many differences that persist between the two sides, the evolving dispute over South China Sea is an important flash point. Friedberg (2005) noted the reports of a PRC diplomatic "charm offensive" in Southeast Asia stirred fears of waning U.S. influence and incipient Chinese regional hegemony. As the Chinese access is expanding from its near abroad to the far flung areas, including Middle East, Africa and beyond, the rivalry or competition is becoming truly a global one. This not only puts credentials of US global hegemony under question but also complicate policy options for regional states, especially the littorals of South China Sea. Congressional Research Service (2024) contains a testimony of US Admiral Philip Davidson stating China is now capable of controlling the South China Sea in all scenarios short of war with the United States. These fact makes clear that Chinese rise is significantly challenging US hegemony, as well as, incentivizing the former to dictate terms in its declared core interests. Interestingly, both China and USA have declared South China Sea (SCS) as their core interest. It can also be said true for littoral states as the sea has prime importance for navigation and oceanic commerce. Fels & Vu (2016) noted at July 2010 ASEAN Regional Forum, then US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated the stability of the SCS is one of the US national interest. This mean that US Rebalance policy will have direct bearings on SCS region. However, as United States is by far the most powerful nation on the globe, China is not in a position perform military balancing against it

Nevertheless, literature on US-China strategic competition include ad-hoc hypothesis like New Cold War or Cold war 2.0 to elaborate growing contention. Tchakarova (2021) argues the message is clear — every state actor, big or small, will have to choose sides between two very different global offerings, each with their own set of norms, rules and ideologies. This statement reflect the options for smaller states to get themselves aligned either with that of USA or China, as the room for another non-aligned movement is rather less than that of early 1950s. If this is to be true, then littorals of South China Sea have so little options available but to make an alliance with United States. This is due to the fact that China and littorals of South China Sea have disputed each other's sovereign claims. Tier (2014) argues threatened countries should create, strengthen, and expand military alliances between mutually interested partners, grow military capability by ensuring adequate defense spending, and demonstrate the willingness to take military action against aggressors in order to lessen the threat of attack. Thus the case of SCS under realist politics creates an ideal situation for the littorals states to perform balancing act against China through forming policy of alliances with USA. However, as a matter of fact, neither of the littoral states has formulated a formal treaty military alliance with USA based on principles of collective security. This is surprising since the South China Sea conflict is not only a political and territorial dispute but the once can pose existential threats. This paper will tend to explore this very aspects, as why littorals of South China Sea have remained vary of forming a formal alliance with USA, or bandwagon with China and hence displayed hedging behavior. The research will remain limited to the alliance behaviors of Philippines, Vietnam and Malaysia among littoral states. As Brunei is a miniature and has negligible role to play in the regional politics, whereas politics of Republic of China (Taiwan) is linked with another phenomenon known as One China issue, is beyond the scope of this inquiry.

Statement of Problem

States often tend to generate behaviors that are not just strange but offer contradictory patterns under one given situation. This situation becomes difficult to contemplate while making it difficult to undertake analysis of alliance politics. Walt (1987) argued the history of alliance formation reveals that states have made contradictory patterns to alliance formation. Few states have tend to align, others not, while those who align, fewer still tend to defect and change alliances from time to time. This quality renders alliance as complex phenomenon difficult to explain through one variable. As multiple variables are involved in decision making process, hence foreign policy outcomes are difficult to predict. Moreover, as the mechanism of internal policy making, elements of power, external environment differs from state to state, decision outcomes often tend to vary. Starr & Siverson (1990) have argued that confronted with a foreign policy situation, apparently distinct or incommensurable behaviors could be chosen, given the situation or context, there may be a many-to-one mapping, or a one-to-many mapping of foreign policy factors and foreign policy responses.

Nevertheless, there also exist some commonalities among all three littorals of South China Sea including Philippines, Vietnam and Malaysia. First, all three are at best second tier states with military power much less to both USA and China. The area claimed by China as its sovereign territory is disputed by all

three states, making them in contention with same country. USA has also disputed Chinese claims over the entirety of sea. USA also conducts Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) to preserve the status of sea as open passage. This US position is in harmony with small states. USA also have range of cordial relations with all three states in contemporary period. As a traditional allied partner of Philippines, an unprecedented relation is also evolving with Vietnam and growing partnership with Malaysia. Therefore, forging a treaty based and formal security alliance would not be an entirely an unimaginable situation. However, none has opted the policy of formal alliance with United States, as of date. Hence, the argument espoused by traditional balance of power theory is not explanatory, despite the fact, SCS conflict represents dispositions of regional and global security. Therefore, this inquiry will try to present threat approximation as an alliance dynamics operating within the given situation. This will be helpful in explaining the logic of hedging behavior often displayed by these states.

Research Design and Data Collection

As the case of formal and treaty based alliance formation has not taken place in the context of South China Sea, therefore this study assumes alliance formation as dependent variable and is dependent upon US' policies. United States being the predominant power pursues its policies rather independently. The threat approximation argued here act as an intervening variable in this study. This approximation or estimation is required to be undertaken by littoral states before making a formal alliance.

In order to operationalize this concept, the need based theory of conflict as argued by John Burton has been used in theoretical framework in detail. The level of analysis debate has also been covered there and this inquiry has been further benefited from rich literature on alliance. These variables have been measured from primary data in the form of government issued policy statements, transcripts issued by official government channel, as well as, secondary data available in the form of expert opinion, books and articles. Moreover statistical inferences will also be made from official data of defense spending, bilateral trade and investment to substantiate the argument.

Research Methods

The research involves cross domains of alliance behaviors on the one side and an analysis of US Rebalance policy. A mixed research method has been used to analyze both qualitative and quantitative data. This enables to answer this basic question, why states threatened by aggressive behavior of China have not yet concluded formal alliance with USA. The mixed research method is helpful in explaining causal relationship that exist between variables.

This inquiry has also been supported by content analysis to some extent. As the research involves presence of certain words, themes, meaning and relationship of the text. For example, if China is consider as a strategic competitor by USA but not adversary, the word selection here hints that although there exist a rivalry between the two, it has not taken the shape of hostile relations. Therefore, this method will be helpful in understanding the context of policy statements and their intensity and underlying meanings intended.

Significance of the Study

This research aims to complement the existing literature on alliance politics, as well as, will do appraisal of US rebalance towards Asia with a specific focus on South China Sea dispute. The variable behind alliance formation will be available for scholastic scrutiny to contribute towards ever evolving discourse of alliance behaviors displayed by states during conflict. Hedging has been designated as preferred option, the variable deliberated will be helpful in explaining this pattern of alliance as well.

Theoretical Framework

In order to develop theoretical framework, the realist theory holds emphatically to define international politics, as not only conflict prone but continuously revolves around struggle to attain power. According to Morgenthau, (1948, p. 13) International politics like all politics is a struggle for power. This struggle for power is embedded in human nature, hence, statecraft is also impacted by it. Nevertheless, states are not just power hungry, assuming so is rather a reductive approach. Waltz (1979) argues theories of international politics that concentrates causes at the individual or national level are reductionist; theories that conceive of causes operating at international level as well are systemic. Although he has favored a systemic approach but he himself had regarded the merit of applying a reductionist approach. This approach will be helpful in elaborating the conflict that exist within South China Sea. This will further benefit this inquiry to explain decision making process involved. Waltz (1979) further noted many have tried to explain international-political events in terms of psychological factors or social-psychological phenomenon or national political and economic characteristics. In at least some of these cases, the possible germane factors by theories of somewhat more power than theories of international politics have been able to generate. Hence, once can assume from here that psycho analytical methods are also important to crack the rationale behind specific policy making. The reductive approach helps to view a phenomenon or policy decision not just with

wholesome approach, but it also looks into its interacting parts and their attributes. For example state decision making apparatus consist of many parts including bureaucracies, public perspective or the leader himself, these parts interact and possess certain attributes. These are also incremental in identifying decision outcomes, although state is often assumed as unitary and rational actor.

This approach will also give it an analytical value, as the parts of a whole are observed with their attributes, properties, specific roles and connections. As South China Sea is a conflict between littoral states, hence it should be understood first. According to Deutsch et al. (2011) Conflict exists when incompatible goals develop between persons, groups, or nations. This disagreement can range from opinion to stated position of a country and is not aligned with other states. The case of SCS is the one that fits this description. All those scenarios where conflict exist there must be contrary positions on stated goals or desire exist. Morasso (2008) noted that conflict can include differences of opinion, but also differences in the parties' desires, goals, etc. this difference of opinion reflects an incongruous of judgment between the parties. Hence, Chinese claim of 9-dash line is based upon what it perceive a historical account of its claims while other littoral states reflect their own position. However, conflict has taken an advance shape as it reflects broad desire of states to control the region. So as to why states have generated these desire is important to understand. Notwithstanding to other variables, State make their official position out of their strategic need. These 'needs' are not only natural but also universal in context, both in individuals or collective subjects in the form of state. South China Sea is the region that not only includes rich potential of marine life but also a major source of fisheries. This region is an important point of Sea Lanes of Communications (SLoC). The country who will acquire control over the sea will have the option to disrupt international sea navigation at will. Burton (1990) argues the need based conflict theorist "had focused on "satisfiers," that is, the means people and groups adopt to pursue their needs. The policy position of all countries in this conflict reflect these satisfiers as their minimum policy benchmarks. China intends to control SCS, while other want to preserve its current status as an open sea. Chinese intention of building and militarizing artificial islands also reflects its strategic need to project power viz-a-viz USA.

The need based theory further postulate that these satisfiers can also reflect dark side of human nature. For example a person may pursue its own development in an organization at the cost of other. Therefore these satisfiers can be conflict making as well. Hence, Chinese need to control SCS in fact comes at the expense of littoral state. The US projection of power and force posturing is required for maintaining its preponderance but it involves threats to other. The need based theory of conflict also designates these needs as analogous to basic human emotions. Hence, it can be argued that these emotions represent a very primary state of affairs of human beings, which gets generated as of a specific need or its satisfaction (*underneath*). Moreover, at the foremost level need is also relevant to survival (*basic human need itself*) since biological animal needs to survive and develop are permanent. From above, an argument for can also be generated for a statecraft that certain human needs are reflective within the decision making process of a country. Thus, these satisfiers can be the cause of foreign policy decision outcomes. The littoral states do not wage war against china to oppose its claim, as Chinese military power is substantial to give these an existential threat, hence survival is at play. The same can be applied in USA-China comparison though military modernization of the later is an effort to narrow the asymmetry that exist between them.

Psychologist have pointed at least four basic emotions. Few contend that there are six natural emotions, all include fear, anger, depression and satisfaction (happiness, joy) Kemper (1987) noted Fear is associated with the autonomic processes indicating the action of epinephrine (E) and anger with the action of norepinephrine (NE). Both these neurochemicals activate the sympathetic nervous system (SNS), although in different ways. Satisfaction and depression, which appear to depend on variable activation of the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) have been associated with the action of acetylcholine (ACh) which is the neurotransmitter of the PNS. Notwithstanding to the chemical properties, fear acts as primary human emotion and hence is incremental in decision making. The secondary emotions result from the interaction of these primary emotions. Also, in the absence of social control agents, it is the primary emotion that overrides every human actions. These four emotions also provide the psychological foundation to human being. Thus, human being are natural to perform threat assessment while making critical decision making.

Since the individuals are not the direct object of this inquiry, yet, all states are composed of individuals as leaders, policy makers and subjects. A nation is the expression of collective manifestation of these individuals or in other words, state actions are reflective of decision maker's psychology. Burton (1990) further argues that whether conflict be within the family or within the international system, the person is the same one in all cases; the person in the family is also the person in the market place, as well as the person who as head of state declares war, and the person who is the terrorist, and the person who runs risks and makes a sacrifice for others. Hence, in all roles a person performs his or her naturalistic attributes are the

same. The fear as primary emotions is thus involved when important policy decisions are undertaken. From this one can conclude US rebalance policy if centered at China, as generally assumed, it reflects fear of Chinese rise as competitor. China's intention to build a defensive buffer in SCS also exhibits the fear of American force posturing. The action of littoral states not to perform hard balancing against China reflects the same. In a nutshell, all parties whether they have chosen an alliance or have avoided, have made consideration of fears (threats) associated with specific policy decisions.

Defining Approximation of Threat

After devising a psycho-analytical disposition of conflict, threat approximation is thus presented as a variable involved in this conflict. It can be defined as estimating underlying cost associated with a specific alliance option. Moreover, the environment of interdependence can complicate this threat assessment. A country if threatened by another country will not perform balancing act, if there exists a geographical proximity and economic interdependence with the same country. The cost will be different depending upon level of interdependence that may exist between them. Hence despite all states may have conflict with China, their decision can still be different in opting an alliance with USA.

This cost should not be understood with security dilemma maxim of an alliance. As alliance faces two types of dilemmas namely abandonment and risk of entrapment. The abandonment refers to the fear, if alliance partner is unable to withstand the original threat and partner may abandon or defect from commitments. The entrapment reflects situation, when action of one alliance partner drags the other into a conflict. Snyder (1984) argues, since the alliance dilemma is mostly a function of tension between the risk of abandonment and risk of entrapment-- reducing one increases the other--dilemma is weak in bipolar alliance. Hence, while making an alliance with USA, littoral states might feel threatened, what, if USA and China comes to terms and the latter may leave its alliance commitment. Also US may also be reluctant in making alliance, as any littoral state may under the false perception of commitment may initiate war against China that will entrap USA to provide defense against it. Therefore, alliance security dilemma can be a cause of alliance avoidance, yet as stated, it is less observant in a bipolar world, where options are less to defect. Although world is not precisely bipolar, the South China Sea at least reflects one, where both USA and China are by far the two most dominant countries as compared to littoral states. The approximation of threat instead refers to estimation of cost that may accrue after an alliance is formulated and not prior threat of entrapment or abandonment.

Approximation of threat is rather a comparison between two costs (threats) attached with an alliance choice. First is the original threat, for example littoral states find *viz-a-viz* China in SCS context, while the other, which will be borne once an alliance is formed against China. Less threatening alliance option eventually will be preferred by smaller states. If an alliance choice increases the threat proximity, it will be avoided no matter if the original threat persists. This threat approximation is said to have existed in the past, especially when French president Charles De Gaulle famously questioned US alliance efficacy, stating, whether USA was ready to trade New York for Paris. As US leadership wanted to be tough on Soviets during Berlin Wall crisis. French leadership was calculating what is at stake, if NATO alliance does take strong action against Soviet. It calculated threat associated with the policy option, as Soviet military retribution will hurt Paris more than New York, being geographically close to Moscow. The same can be said true for appeasement policy, when British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain opted for not balancing against Germany, once it invaded Czechoslovakia, so as to avoid the war. British leadership must have taken a threat assessment as what was at stake in losing Czechoslovakia or to fight a war with Germany.

Alliance Theory

After defining the approximation of threat variable it is now pertinent to adjust the same in alliance literature. Walt (1987) noted When confronted by a significant external threat, state may either balance or bandwagon. *Balancing* is defined as allying with other powers against the external threat; *bandwagoning* refers to alignment with source of danger. Hence, by this argument, littorals of South China Sea are threatened by China and are required to perform balancing action against it. Morgenthau (1948) argues the aspiration of power on the part of several nations, each trying either to maintain or to overthrow the status quo, leads necessity to a constellation which is called the balance of power and to politics aim at preserving it. Therefore, Chinese aspiration of power or US desire to maintain status quo, both will lead towards establishing balance of power. Paul et al. (2004, p. 2) refers balancing behavior continues to characterize the great power behavior in twenty first century. There may not be an equal distribution of power, but balancing is a process where an equal distribution of power emerges over time. This further highlights that states especially major powers always look for stability of the system that is based upon equal distribution of power. Where such power is absent the alliance formation will result. Furthermore, imbalances of power is naturally threatening for weaker states, more so if a conflict is involved. Hence state will align to reduce this

threat. The approximation of threat is involved it opts not to do so.

Waltz (1979) narrates alliances are made by states that have some but not all of their interests common. The common interest is ordinarily a negative one: fear of other states. Therefore, here exist every reason that these littoral states should establish an alignment with a powerful state. Selden (2016) noted by aligning with United States without becoming formal ally, secondary states [Littoral here] incur risks without guarantees of security provided by a formal alliance. Therefore, it would be logical and rational for these state to formulate a formal treaty based alliance that contains clear security commitments. Again approximation of threat is being considerate here.

As hard balancing or soft balancing is not the strategy adopted, nor does under balancing is an appropriate option. Hedging has been the most dominant behavior adopted by littoral of South China Sea. According to Chwee Kuik (2016) hedging is the most common strategy adopted by regional states in Asia Pacific seeking to navigate between an ascendant China and still dominant USA. This is rather mix, confusing behavior to undertake such relation with a powerful country that neither admits power acceptance nor a display power rejection. It contains an opportunity to revert back from a position taken, if the circumstances require it. Hence, while doing threat approximation, smaller states can calculate what is at stake and up to what degree an alignment be maintained. The retraction option always remains available in associated cost increases.

Measuring the Concept

After dispensing the variable it is now important to measure threat approximation with Data provided. So what is at stake at which hinders littoral states to formulate alliances? There is lot to lose for these states. The economic interdependence that exist between littoral states viz-a-viz China and United States reveal this reality. Chinese National Bureau of Statistics (2017) that the volume of bilateral trade with Philippines was around 51 billion \$. Whereas United States Census Bureau (2017) indicates the volume of bilateral trade between USA and Philippines stood at 20 billion \$ approximately. The comparison even widened with China traded goods and services of worth 55.6 billion \$ with Philippines in 2018, while USA trade volume was approximately about 21 Billion \$. Moreover, the Philippines bilateral trade with China crossed 60 billion \$ mark, whereas, it stood at around 21 billion dollars in 2019. Hence, on can easily calculate, three times more trading interest of Philippines are attached with China as compare to USA. A balancing behavior against China can render an immediate loss of this trading option. Moreover, China has included Philippines in its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with pledge of billions of dollars of investment, loans and grants. Therefore, Philippines despite brought South China Sea case to Arbitration Court against China, still it values its relationship with it.

As far as Vietnam is concerned, its bilateral trade comparison between USA and China by far is in favor of the later. The highest ever US export volume to Vietnam stood at approximately 11 billion \$ in 2022. China export 100 billion \$ to Vietnam the same year. This means Vietnam is at minimum having ten times more trading interest with China than that of USA. It is of no surprise as USA-Vietnam bilateral relation remained very turbulent during Cold War. However, as China-Vietnam do have clashes over the territory dispute in South China Sea, still there is lot at stake between these two sides.

The case of Malaysia is no different in context. Nevertheless, US has largest trading exchange with Malaysia as compare to the other two littoral states. In 2017, US bilateral trade with Malaysia stood at around 50 billion \$, the volume with China was three times more than it. In fact, for so many year China has been the largest trading partner of Malaysia over the years. China and Malaysia are also the member of organization known as Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RECP). This is not only a free trade organization but was even considered as a Chinese answer to US led Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), though, US never joined it officially. Hence, the threat associated with becoming a member of an anti-China alliance have a huge economic cost associated.

In the defense arena, the statistics are overwhelmingly in favor of United States. World Bank (2022) issued the data of annual defense spending of United States stood at 876 billion \$, whereas, Chinese highest ever spending of the same year was 291 billion \$. Hence these statistics are highly in favor United States. This is the fact that China has avoided a direct confrontation with United States, while the latter operates within South China Sea under freedom of Navigation operations. However, China is growing its military capabilities at an unprecedented rate. Americans believe that this will have implications for US military preponderance. According to Department of Defence (2017) assessment, China's military modernization is targeting capabilities with the potential to degrade core U.S. military-technological advantages. This mean that China is investing in such technologies that can plug the gap currently exist in US favor. The Department of Defense (2019) report argues China is also developing a wide array of anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities, which could be used to prevent countries from operating in areas near China's

periphery, including the maritime and air domains that are open to use by all countries. These A2/AD technologies are meant to avoid amphibious assault at the eastern coast, a Chinese fear in its strategic calculation. Nevertheless, China is investing in multiple domains to achieve tactical and operation advantage in case of a conflict. Growing Chinese missile capabilities along with enhanced ISR capabilities mean it can operate with strategic autonomy. The defense budget of littoral states is fraction to that of Chinese military budget. Hence, in case of any escalation, these countries will be within the very firing range of Chinese military. An alignment with USA can make these a legitimate target.

Appraisal of US Rebalance towards Asia

The Rebalance policy as elaborated earlier reflected a paradigm shift in US history. It was formally pronounced during the third year of first term of Obama's presidency. The idea was floated by the then Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, through his written piece for Foreign Policy Magazine. Clinton (2011) stated the future of politics will be decided in Asia, not Afghanistan or Iraq, and the United States will be at the center of action. This policy as it is called as America's Pacific turn was aimed at entrenching US interests in Asia Pacific. The same was even elaborated earlier during the visit of both President Obama and Secretary Clinton to Southeast Asia region. The policy since then had been interpreted by many experts of international politics. A dominant characterization of Rebalance policy has been that of military containment of China. Logan (2015) narrates Washington is ringing China with an array of bilateral alliances and partnerships, all of which are more or less anti-China. This impression was not only puzzling for China but littoral states was also witnessing US policy action with attention. Therefore, while US did try to even contemplate its intent to have cordial relationship with China, it never went well for littoral states as they deemed changing relation can confuse their ties with the later. Moreover, the militaristic interpretation of the policy never go well, as countries do not wish to generate hostile environment that can disturb regional peace and security. Therefore, during many ASEAN meetings, the regional countries demanded restraint, peaceful coexistence and finding amicable solution as priority.

The policy pronouncement was followed by multiple visits by the members of US diplomatic corps. As a matter of fact, Secretary Clinton made more visits to Asia Pacific region than any of her predecessor in the post-Cold war. Moreover, US did pronounce that it is interested in invigorating existing alliances and forging new with countries of the region. Clinton (2010) remarked we are practicing what you might call "forward-deployed" diplomacy. And by that we mean we've adopted a very proactive footing; we've sent the full range of our diplomatic assets – including our highest-ranking officials, our development experts, our teams on a wide range of pressing issues – into every corner and every capital of the Asia-Pacific region. This was aimed at bolstering US image and resolve as espoused in Rebalance towards Asia Policy. Nevertheless, despite all these visits and efforts littoral states remained conscious of making an alliance that may complicate their relation with China.

Conclusion

From the above arguments, one can easily conclude that the rebalance policy and its orientation was not suitable for regional countries, as they preferred a peaceful approach in solving disputes. Moreover, the existence of strong economic interdependence between China and littoral states makes it difficult for these countries to do hard balancing against China. This reflect that threat estimation is involved in decision making process rendering these countries to conclude that associated cost will be more than accruing benefits from alliance.

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