

THE US POLICY OF “REBALANCE” AND CHINA’S COUNTER-TACTICS

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Abstract: In 2011, National Bureau of Asian Research at the US Department of State was “absolutely panicked” that Beijing would understand that American military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan were drawing down so sought to describe this more positively, and initially they put forward the term “the turn to Asia”. In the article “*America’s Pacific Century*”, which appeared in the November 2011 issue of *Foreign Policy*, Hillary Clinton used the concept of “Pivot” instead of “Turn”, its content included the statements and deployments towards Asia - Pacific, becoming one of the highlights of the Barack Obama government’s security and foreign policy. This policy achieved initial successful deployments, especially when President Obama announced an agreement for 2,500 US Marines based in Darwin (Australia), and he became the first America President attending the East Asia Summit (in Bali), the “Pivot” became seemingly unknown after those successes. If the US can turn to Asia, it can turn away in the future. Washington needs something long-term and “Pivot” has become “Rebalance” within six months.

This article tries to present some notable points about content of “Rebalance” by reviewing the Chinese’s counter-measures in different levels and Myanmar case.

1. The US policy towards the Asia - Pacific region

The essence of the “Pivot” policy is to improve the US involvement and presence in importantly geopolitical regions in the Asia - Pacific, to strengthen the US strategic interests in the fields of economy, politics and military. This policy focuses on four main pillars: tightening relations with traditional allies; developing partnerships with emerging powers; forming a constructive relationship with China; and actively participating in multilateral mechanisms in the region.

After taking office in 2009, the President Obama has made moves to return to the Asia - Pacific region of the US. This policy is clear through the dense schedule of international visits to all ten ASEAN member states and Timor - Leste from the end of 2011 to the end of 2012 by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. In July 2012, Clinton visited Cambodia to attend the fourth ASEAN Regional Forum. In November 2012, President B. Obama made his first foreign visit to Southeast Asia after he won in the election to stay one more venture as president of USA. He became the first sitting U.S. president to visit Myanmar in order to encourage economic and political reforms; to visit Thailand and meet Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra “to emphasize a solid alliance” between the two countries and to Cambodia's 2012 ASEAN Chairmanship. In that context, the term “Pivot” is given to describe the shift in major policy of the White House to the Asia - Pacific region, after more than a decade of focus on the Middle East region with two devastating wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Along with the implementation of "Pivot", the US began to adapt and receive new problems that arises with new powers and traditional allies. In the policy towards the Asia - Pacific, the US always insists that they have never left this area, their "Pivot" is just a return to the region that had been interested since the World War I to assert the presence and to regain the necessary rights for the US's development in all aspects, especially in economy and military. For the ASEAN region, the US always devotes its presence to sensitive and strategic geographical and strategic areas, from which they can control positively the most core issues.

With its potential, the US always knows how to create close allies becoming a fundamental and concrete step to control strategic points that affects the US's interests. The permanent extension of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the US and Japan signed in 1960, the close relationship of the US - Korea alliance or Thailand's case in the Vietnam War are undebatable evidences on the US policy. Continuing the traditional approach, and to ensure the success of the "Pivot" or "Rebalance" policy in the Asia - Pacific region, on the one hand, the US promotes tightening relations with traditional allies; on the other hand, actively developing partnerships with emerging countries, including "phenomena" of Myanmar, a country especially attracted the attention of many great powers with the decision to strongly reform with democratic reforms in all aspects, first of all politic, economy, and foreign policy. The US "Pivot" policy in Asia - Pacific becomes clearer and more complex as its return faces the benefit of other great powers, especially China.

Beyond diplomatic statements, the US began deploying a "return" to Southeast Asia by choosing a "close contact" approaches of exchange relations, cooperation to deeply engage in Southeast Asia "softly", "flexibly" and "skillfully". The Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited firstly Indonesia, "the leading country" of the ASEAN region and the world's most populous Muslim country and promised to keep a "close connection" with ASEAN, raising the policy of "return to Southeast Asia" (Vietnam News, 18/7/2010, p. 1-2). In doing so, the US has increasingly involved in ASEAN activities. In addition, by the "flexible and real capacity" policy, the US gradually affirmed its role in the region, demonstrating its presence in the hottest areas, in which Myanmar is one the considered cases. However, although there were statements and high-level visits of both the Secretary of State and the US President to the ASEAN regions, that the US returns to Asia - Pacific is not a simple as ASEAN member countries still look forward to more strong and realistic actions from the US, especially the equivalent connection between policies in trade and politics and security in the US's "Pivot". However, the US has not yet given to ASEAN a satisfactory answer to the most fundamental issues, such as how it can "intervene" in the security issues of the Asia - Pacific region in "Pivot" strategy; when, where and how deeply it perform?

The US's policy in the Asia - Pacific depends not only on the American desires and actions, but also on receivers and external factors affecting the region. It is very China with unprecedented aggression in issues of the South China Sea, India with a strong policy of "Eastern Forward", and Russia with a project to return to the Asia - Pacific gently and cautiously.

Being a component of the American Asia - Pacific strategy, the fundamental purpose of the "return" plan to Southeast Asia is to comprehensively enhance its influence and existence in this region. ASEAN countries are seeking to take advantage

from the competition of major countries to conduct the opened regionalism and enforce foreign policy of “equality between major countries”; maximize benefits in security and economy. Although they want to believe on the US’s policy, they cannot unconditionally do it. Those countries have a strong sense of self-control and many countries consider the US’s returning¹. Therefore, it is very difficult for the US and ASEAN to recover the coalition as in the Cold War period.

After joining the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC)², the US faces constraints of the treaty principles such as “recognizing and respecting each other’s sovereignty, not interfering in each other’s internal affairs, resolving disputes by peaceful means”. Although ASEAN is a regional organization, it is very complex and different between its members. Furthermore, the lack of consensus in the organization and the different attitudes of each members with China on maritime and island issues are major obstacles for the US’s “Pivot” policy.

Especially, the American success of the Pivot policy in Southeast Asia deeply depends on how both China and US address the “Myanmar issue”. For a long time, this issue is not only a bottleneck in the relationship between the US and Thailand, but also an important factor affecting US - ASEAN relations. After signing the TAC, Secretary of State Hillary suggested ASEAN that if the military government of Myanmar did not release the NLD Party’s leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, ASEAN must consider expelling Myanmar from this organization. However, for many years, ASEAN has always maintained a gentle and soft attitude in relations with Myanmar as well as Aung San Suu Kyi, and this policy cannot be changed due to the US. For that reason, how the US responses to the “Myanmar issue” has become one of the biggest obstacles and challenge for the US’s success of the Pivot policy in the framework of ASEAN.

2. Chinese’s counter-tactics

2.1. “One Belt One Road (OBOR)” - China’s grand global strategy

Before the 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the policy of “peaceful rise” had still been the main direction in order to focus on developing the internal strength and promoting “soft power” of China. Under Hu Jintao, China’s economy developed strongly, became the second largest economy in the world by 2010.

This is also the foundation for China to build many strategic relationships with outsiders, especially neighboring countries³. After Xi Jinping took power in 2012, China’s foreign policy has had many important changes in response to the new situation,

¹ According to 2009 statistics, Southeast Asia has about 19% of about 1.5 billion Muslims worldwide, most of them have strong feelings of “hatred for the US”, “resistance to the US”, especially after the event of September 11, 2001. (Pew Research Center, 10-2009, pp. 8, 9, 17, 19)

² In July 2009, the US was the 16th country to sign the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), which reflected the highest political commitment of the US to ASEAN and contributed to peace and stability in the Southeast. This event is considered the pinnacle in the relationship between the two sides. This is also an important step for the US to determine the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea in July 2010 in its “national interests”.

³ In October 2003, China became the first strategic partner of ASEAN; In November 2004, the ACFTA - Trade Area Agreement between China and ASEAN was signed; China proactively launched the East Asia Summit to replace the ASEAN + 3 mechanism to promote cooperation in East Asia and the first East Asia Summit held in Kuala Lumpur in December 2005...

including the US "rebalance" policy. Specifically, China has implemented a policy of "big-power" in foreign diplomacy, actively proposed and participated and taken the lead in establishing new cooperation approaches and rules in the region and in the world in accordance with the "Chinese Dream"⁴. The "Chinese Dream" mentions "the great revival of the Chinese nation" and means that Chinese people was happy, healthy and prosperous; and China will be on par with the US, able to lead the international system and demonstrate the success of China's development model.

In doing so, China focuses on building a "new model of major power relationship", first with the US. China also proposed to build a new model of "US - China military relations" with the implication of "mutual respect and trust, cooperation and stability". The above proposals are from the desire to keep major countries in stable situation to protect national security. The main target of this model is to counter the US "Rebalance" strategy, but its specific goal is to create a favorable environment to protect Chinese core interests such as sovereignty, security and developmental benefits.

On foreign affairs, China's Xi launched OBOR as "project of the century"⁵. It is the most important diplomatic strategy as Xi Jinping followed more positive foreign policy rather than the previous leaders' policies of "hiding himself from time", "avoiding pioneering".

OBOR was initially announced in 2013 with a purpose of restoring the ancient Silk Route that had connected Asia and Europe and its scope has been expanded over the years to include new territories and development initiatives. The project covers two parts. Firstly, the "Silk Road Economic Belt" is primarily land-based and is expected to connect China with Central Asia, Eastern Europe and Western Europe. Secondly, the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" is sea-based and is expected to link China's southern coast with the Mediterranean, Africa, South - East Asia and Central Asia. The names are confusing as the 'Belt' is actually a network of roads, and the 'Road' is actually a sea route (Trung Hieu, November 8, 2018).

⁴ During a tour of the National Museum of China on the November 29, 2012 "Revival Road", Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out "Chinese Dream" with the content to achieve national prosperity, national rejuvenation and people's happiness. By March 17, 2013, in a speech at the closing session of its National People's Congress, Xi Jinping officially stated "Chinese Dream" and then this term was widely used by media.

⁵ "Belt and Road" towards strategic objectives of politics, security, economy, territorial sovereignty and build a new framework of game rules in the region and the world, in which China plays the mainstream role. The BR initiative (BRI) is considered a breakthrough in China's neighboring diplomacy policy because it is not only reserved for neighboring countries, but its main subjects is still China's neighbor (Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, Central and South Asia) to establish a region of Chinese influence within the "great border", thereby creating a position and power for China's global strategy, competing with the US and exceeding the US. "Belt and Road" is therefore, a great effort by China to redistribute the area of influence, first of all in the surrounding area.

At the strategic level, the "Belt and Road" is designed to realize the "Chinese Dream" goal, first of all to create a presence, to increase economic influence in the surrounding area. China. As planned, the "Belt, the Road" when completed will create the largest economic/trade network in the world with the potential to cover large areas with 70% of the world's population, 55% of GDP of world and 75% of the world's resources. Along the "Belt, the Road" is the vibrant economic areas of the world, most of them are emerging markets with the advantage of the following countries and have a large development space. "Belt, the Road" can create a revolution in the transportation sector connecting the three continents, promoting international trade in an unprecedented scale (Tran Viet Thai, November 9, 2018).

To urge more countries to join this project, since 2013, as the “Chinese Dream” was initiated, China has always sought to promote diplomatic and propaganda activities at all levels and forums. China affirmed that OBOR is carried out on the principle of Peaceful Coexistence: mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. In order to apply the OBOR overseas, China has taken six important steps including: conducting high-level advocacy; propagating in forums, international and regional conferences...; connecting finance by establishing banks and investment funds under China's control in the spirit of “a community of shared destiny”; linking transportation (investment in infrastructure construction); commerce and people (Tran Viet Thai, 9/11/2018)⁶.

Regarding to economy, many projects have been implemented in many countries in the Asia - Pacific, Central Asia, South Asia and even Europe and Africa. A number of key and strategic projects have been implemented and China seems to control over these projects (Tran Viet Thai, November 9, 2018). From the perspective of international relations, it is clear that this is China's reaction to the US's “Rebalance” policy and

⁶ According to Dr. Tran Viet Thai, 6 specific activities are as follows:

“Firstly, conduct high-level mobilization. High-ranking Chinese leaders have formally visited countries along the “Belt, the Road” to tighten relations, propose the cooperation ties, call for the participation and support of countries for the BRI. According to estimates, in the first year after launching the BRI, from September 2013 to October 2014, Chinese leaders conducted 13 foreign visits (3) to promote this initiative. In 2015, Chinese President Xi Jinping went on an official visit to India, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Indonesia. During a visit to Russia (2015), the two state leaders pledged to support each other in the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), which Russia played a leading role and a Chinese-initiated Silk Road.

Secondly, China's propaganda about the Belt and Road Initiative. China has integrated the content of the BRI into the international forums hosted or participated by China. In addition, China also uses the scholar channel (4) to promote the BRI and organize international fairs and exhibitions to propagate maritime silk routes (5)...

Thirdly, financial and monetary connectivity through the establishment of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB, 2013), the new Development Bank (NDB, July 2014) and the Silk Road Foundation. silk (SRF, November 2014) under the motto of building “Community of common destiny”, to counter-balance Western-dominated institutions (6), which China has no advantage; established China Investment Cooperation Fund - Central Europe and Western Europe (worth 3 billion USD), promoting the effectiveness of China - ASEAN Investment Cooperation Fund.

Fourth, transportation connectivity. For a long time, China has developed and achieved certain results on high-speed railway projects from North to South, from the East to the underdeveloped areas in the West and Southwest. China considers it as an opportunity to connect with regions in South Asia, Europe, Africa and even the Americas. Building seaports is also an important part of implementing the “BRI”.

Fifth, economic and commercial connectivity. According to the Ministry of Commerce of China, China has established 118 economic and trade cooperation zones (7) in more than 50 countries, of which 77 cooperatives are located in 23 countries on the “the Belt and Road”. Up to now, 2,790 Chinese companies have been put into operation in these areas, with an investment of US \$ 12 billion, creating a value of up to US \$ 48 billion. China currently has about 25,000 overseas companies with a total assets of about \$ 3,000 billion and creates jobs for about 1 million Chinese workers (8).

Sixth, connecting people (people connectivity). Human connection is considered by the Chinese as a social foundation for the construction of “Belt and Road”, which plays an important role in strengthening bilateral and multilateral cooperation. (Tran Viet Thai November 9, 2018)”.

influence of the "Pivot". Therefore, it is possible to consider "OBOR" as a strategic tool for China to compete with the US.

Historically, "OBOR" was initiated after "Pivot", so it reflected the autonomy of Barrack Obama in the game, but Xi Jinping's attempt would have an advantage of the follower after identifying the goals and moves of the competitor. Therefore, many researchers believe that, during the Obama period, the US's policy towards China included many mistakes (Hong Thuy, November 9, 2018), as "guaranteeing" China to become uncontrollable power, especially Beijing's aggressiveness, determination in China's "core benefits" or its continual disregard of the international law in the South China Sea.

Currently, the successes or failures of the competition between the "Pivot" and "OBOR" can not be predicted due to the lack of parameters and data. However, in terms of history of international relations in particular, and history broadly, it can be seen that from the early modern period, the US has always considered the Asia - Pacific as a strategic point to become a superpower. After the American Revolution, the US sought to expand their influence in the Americas with the Monroe Doctrine. When its power was strengthened after World War I, through the Washington Conference (December 12, 1921 to February 6, 1922) the US attempted to influence in the Asia - Pacific and considered Asia - Pacific as the gateway beyond America, avoid clashing and competing with European powers. After World War II, with increasing resources, the US tried to dominate Europe, blockade its main rival, the Soviet Union in the Cold War. After the Cold War, the war against terrorism forced the US to concentrate its strength in Western Asia. As China became risk towards the US, it changed to the "Pivot" policy. Obviously, the "Rebalance" of Obama can be found in the series of "Pivots" of the US. China's reactions through "OBOR" are clearly aimed at consolidating, expanding their role in the world order, simultaneously urging other forces, especially neighbouring countries with the security goals. China's policies towards its neighbors in "OBOR" show this goal precisely.

2.2. China's counter-tactics in Southeast Asia

The Chinese changes in foreign policy is that she views all countries in the world are partners and those are divided into 4 groups according to their priority and importance towards China, both economy and politics. 1. The highest partnership is only Russia; 2. Friendly partnership (South Korea, Brazil, South Africa, India, Canada, Ukraine, Belarus, Mexico, Argentina...) has no conflict from same fundamental interests but temporary struggle with China; 3. Consensus-based partnership (European Union (EU) and ASEAN countries) where China has a lot economic interests but contradictory politics in key issues of territorial disputes; 4. Pragmatic partnership (the US and Japan) which China considers as "potential strategic competitors".

Among the above partnership, China focuses on neighboring and big countries. However, there are many issues between China and its neighbors which is one of the main reasons leading to the Chinese changes of foreign policy towards those countries. China advocates neighboring diplomatic relations in six regions including Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, West Asia and the South Pacific; combining the coordination of four neighboring diplomatic schemes between

“breakthrough at sea” and “actively Westward”, between “standing firmly inside” and “deploying overseas”. The guideline of the China’s changes in foreign policy is “to hold firmly in strategy, not to be disturbed by the common events”; shifting from “passively cope with, overcoming the negative” to “proactively counter-attacking, positively responding”, strengthening strategic elements and security factors in adjusting diplomacy with neighbours, makes those policies better in serving China’s overall foreign strategy.

Towards Asia, China proposed a “new Asian security perspective” to seek its key role in the regional security system. This issue was officially launched by Xi Jinping firstly at the Fourth Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) in Shanghai (5/2019) under the themes of increasing dialogue, mutual trust and collaboration to build a new Asia that is peaceful, stable and cooperative. Accordingly, China advocates “Asian countries should take the lead in dealing with Asian affairs, and Asian countries have the capacity and wisdom to safeguard and promote security in Asia through strengthened cooperation”. This policy differs from previous claims that “the broad Pacific Ocean is vast enough to embrace both China and the United States”.

Towards Southeast Asia, to implement the “Chinese Dream”, at the Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs (11/2014), China’s diplomacy with its neighbors was increased to the top priority. This issues was published by the Xinhua with the concept of “Building community of common destiny, maintaining common diplomatic conception on “amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness”⁷, friendly with neighbors, being a partner, persevering in harmony, being peaceful with neighbors, enriching neighbors, deepening mutually beneficial cooperation and connecting with other nations”; “all to negotiate, to create and to benefit”. At this conference, Xi Jinping called for “promoting foreign policy with neighboring countries, establishing a favorable environment for China’s development, allowing its neighbors to benefit more from the increase of China for general development goals” (Xinhua News Agency, October 25, 2013). He emphasized the focus of China’s external activities is to promote the development of OBOR in order to connect Asian countries to build up the common destiny of China - ASEAN, promoting the community of Asian destiny” (cited in Tran Thi Hai Yen, October, 2018, p. 320). He also underlined the importance of pursuing win-win cooperation and promoting a new type of international relations featuring win-win cooperation in every aspect of their external relations such as political, economic, security and cultural fields. We (China and ASEAN) should uphold justice and pursue shared interests. This means that we should act faithfully, friendshiply, and justily.

In fact, China seems to be quite aggressive in handling the South China Sea issues such as making territorial claims despite international rules. After submitting to the United Nations the unreasonably claim of “the nine-dash line” including an area occupying over 80% of the South China Sea area in 2009, China has unilaterally carried out many illegal activities to monopolize this region. Those activities are the biggest challenge to US’s “Pivot” strategy to Asia. The international community condemned

⁷ “amity” is considered as a goal; “sincerity” và “mutual benefit” is considered as major measures; “inclusiveness” is considered as foundation. “sincerity” và “mutual benefit” are mainly in the field of political security; “inclusiveness” is mainly on economic aspects.”

China's uses of physical force to dominate other countries. It also proves the contradiction of China's ongoing strategy in the region. On the one hand, China wants to build forces, especially in its neighbors, to break the siege caused by the US's "Pivot" policy; on the other hand, China's actions has increased the suspicions of neighbors, the phenomenon of "Sinophobia" became more popular.

In addition to the aggressive actions in the South China Sea, China has also conducted meetings and discussions with senior leaders in the region through the ASEAN + 1, ASEAN + 3 and EAS. ASEAN Secretary - General and ASEAN Member States Ministers also regularly meet with China through ARF, ASEAN / PMC... For more than 5 years, along with diplomatic and propaganda, China has initially received quite active political supports from most Southeast Asian countries. Initially, only Laos, Cambodia and Thailand announced their support and commitment to participate in the "OBOR". So far, most ASEAN countries have supported and participated. Many cooperation projects between China and ASEAN countries, focus on infrastructure development, railways, roads, ports, hydropower development, oil pipelines and industrial zones are being deployment. In the process of promoting the "OBOR" in Southeast Asia. China has promoted the connection of the "OBOR" to the national development strategy of regional countries such as Cambodia's "Quadrangle" strategy, Indonesia's "Maritime Axis" initiative, "Vision Brunei 2035", "Philippines Vision 2040", "China - Malaysia Economic and Trade Cooperation Planning", "Strategy to Connect Laos to the sea", "Singapore - China Strategic Linking Initiative", "Thailand's 4.0 Strategy"... As a result, the OBOR is easy to be accepted by ASEAN members.

Recently, responses to the OBOR are quite diverse. Generally, most big countries have not participated, except for Russia although Moscow has a major trade relationship with the EU. Neighboring countries such as India and Japan tend to compete and boycott; some small countries are quite positive; and the rest countries are cautious. Some researchers highly appreciates the contribution of the OBOR to the socio-economic development in Southeast Asia, especially the connectivity of infrastructure in participating countries. However, others consider that although some positive results were achieved, the process of deploying the "OBOR" in Southeast Asia is rejected psychologically. Governments and agencies, including public and private sectors in some Southeast Asian countries have concerned about the lack of transparency in investment projects under the "OBOR" as well as the capital increase, slow progress, slow disbursement of Chinese enterprises. Only 7% of Chinese investment in Indonesia from 2005 - 2014 period was implemented (Thanh Binh, November 10, 2018). Many investment projects used outdated technology, poor quality equipment and materials that lead to the presence of many Chinese laborers who migrate to the host country and cause negative consequences to the ecological environment and culture - society of the participated countries. Countries which has sovereignty disputes with China in the South China Sea are also concerned that the deployment of the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" will impact on territorial sovereignty, national interests and security of the disputed countries with China in the South China Sea. As such some countries support China as Cambodia, but others tries to escape from China as Myanmar.

3. American - Chinese competition in the Myanmar's transition

Before the democratization process in Myanmar, the relation between the US and Myanmar was quite tense, while China kept a close relationship with Myanmar. From “unexpected, different and miraculous” changes in 2010, the American - Myanmar relation developed rapidly. Myanmar's changes in opinions and foreign policy are considered were difficult and controversial which to abolish China's monopoly and catch up new opportunities from the US and the world based on its awareness of Myanmar's role and position in the region.

The Myanmar - US relations were getting better due to their attempts. On 30/11/2011, Myanmar welcomed the visit of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. It took place just few hours before Ms Suu Kyi confirmed that she would participate in the National Assembly elections of the new civilian government of President Thein Sein, when the NLD Party officially registered to return as a political party. This is the first visit of the US Secretary of State after nearly half a century.⁸ It marked an upgraded relation after frozen decades also demonstrated the American increasing support and aid towards Myanmar. As a result, Myanmar released hundreds of political prisoners and dissidents. Hillary Clinton announced the US upgraded its diplomatic relations with Myanmar to the Ambassador level. It demonstrates Washington's rapid change in upgrading diplomatic relations with the transition government of Myanmar. It is also the statement of President Thein Sein in the effort to normalize relations with the US. On 11/7/2012, the US officially lifted economic sanctions on Myanmar. It clearly demonstrates the US's attitude and reaction to Myanmar's important economic and political transitions.

Both Myanmar and the US need to support each other. The US needs to prove its position in Myanmar as the Asia - Pacific witnessed large changes under pressures of powers. Myanmar needs the US to ensure that its transformational goals were recognized and supported by both people in Myanmar and in the world. Myanmar needs the US to solve its crisis as the isolation and embargo policies of the US and Western countries mainly caused Myanmar's crisis. Therefore, positive changes in the US - Myanmar relations since President Thein Sein conducted a transitional period are significant .

Along with the reform of Myanmar's civilian government, the US - Myanmar relations warmed up, especially in the visit of the President of Myanmar on 20/5/2013. This summited meeting is considered a historic point as Thein Sein was the first Myanmar leader to visit the US officially since 1966⁹. Accordingly, sanctions are lifted, the American companies are allowed to invest in key areas of the Myanmar industries, including oil and gas industries. They also have an opportunity to provide financial services which has been China's monopoly. The “Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement” was signed by the US's Trade Representative Demetrios Marantis and the Myanmar's Deputy Trade Minister Pwint San. This agreement forms a foundation for

⁸ Before Hillary Clinton, the only US Secretary of State who visited Myanmar was John Foster Dulles (1955).

⁹ In 1966, President Lyndon Johnson received his Myanmar counterpart Ne Win at the White House. Since then, along with the freezing of bilateral relations is economic sanctions, embargo to the US for Myanmar, so no Myanmar leader was invited to Washington before President Thein Sein's visit.

bilateral dialogue and cooperation between the two countries in both trade and investment. The US committed to support reforms in Myanmar being foundation for Myanmar's peace and prosperity in the future (Xinhua, May 23, 2013). This is a huge step to connect the US and Myanmar and help the US to approach to ASEAN countries and Asia - Pacific via Myanmar gate.

Although the US tried to confirm that its "Pivot" plan did not struggle with Beijing, its activities and conflicts in Myanmar is an obvious fact towards China. China is always cautious in their statements towards Myanmar, but are very quick in its reactions and flexible in adjusting and resolving the problem in Myanmar. Although China has repeatedly affirmed that "there is no intention to seek influence space in the Indian Ocean" (Renmim Ribao, 1998, p. 36), the fact is that via Myanmar it is finding a trading gate for the Southern provinces (Yunnan, Sichuan) being "locked" inland by geographical factors.

The Beijing's goal is to make Myanmar as a pedal/foundation, a buffer zone to support economic development of Western and Southern China. Therefore, China's investment in Myanmar is to invest in the southern and western provinces of China, to help them to equalize the income gap with their eastern ones and create economic competitive advantage with neighboring India. It is a part of the "Two Oceans Policy"¹⁰ that Chinese academic politicians advocated (to master both the Pacific and Indian Oceans). From 1996 to 2005, trade between Yunnan and Myanmar accounted for about 55% of Myanmar's total trade value. About 80% of Myanmar exports to China and its 40% imports was transited via Yunnan (Maung Aung Myoe, 2007, p. 30).

The most important role of Myanmar is a go-between to transfer oil from the Middle East and Africa to inland China helping to avoid Malacca's "gateway". Depending on importing oil, 80% Chinese imported oil was brought across Malacca, one of the busiest straits which and narrowest place in the world with only 2.7 km in width, China is afraid that Malacca will be closed and oil supplies are congested as conflicts occurs. It is necessary for China to establish a horizontal pipeline via Myanmar. A series of infrastructure projects began to take place: "From a highway to a new millions-dollar port that serve the export of manufactured goods in the provinces of western and southern China; to a pipeline of more than 1,600 km bringing oil from the Middle East and Africa to the refineries in Yunnan; to a gas pipeline through Myanmar to light up Kunming and Chongqing; to spend more than 20 billion USD to invest in a high-speed train that takes nearly one day for travelling (it took a month before); then in 2016, a rail system from Yangon to Beijing or even to Delhi and from there to Europe" (Qingrun Song, 2010).

In 29/7/2013, the Myanmar - China gas pipeline (part of Myanmar territory) was officially inaugurated in Mandalay and began to bring gas to China. The pipeline is 793 km long, with 6 treatment stations, from Kyaukpyu port on the west coast of Myanmar, crossing the Rakhine, Magway, Mandalay and Shan states and entering Chinese territory in Ruili (Yunnan). Myanmar - China oil pipeline is 771 km long, designed to transport 22 million tons of crude oil/year. It was expected to be completed in September 2013 to

¹⁰ Under this strategy, Myanmar is the bridge leading to the Bay of Bengal and other seas. Another important reason is energy security. China relies heavily on imported oil, of which 80% passes through the Strait of Malacca near Singapore.

transport crude oil from the Middle East through the Indian Ocean” (Bertil Lintner, December 1, 2011). Operating with full capacity the dual pipeline systems with investment of 4.7 billion USD can transport 23 million m³/year. China’s domestic oil production output is expected to reach 220 million tons/year by 2020, but with an average GDP growth rate of 7%/year, Chinese oil consumption can rapidly increase over 650 million tons/year. Briefly, China needs energy and a stable energy transportation-route and Myanmar is the first choice (*Chinese and Myanmar lessons*, December 7, 2018). Therefore, as Myanmar turns to the West, China does not want to lose Myanmar.

Beside the economic advantages, China clearly understand the important strategic position of Myanmar in the region. China is seeking to make Myanmar as a “California state of Chinese people” (Toshihiro Kudo, 2007, p. 3), a place that enriches the Chinese people. That process has created a resentment for almost people in Myanmar as their national rights and honor are trampled. Accordingly, the Myanmar reform conducting from 2010 was a prepared, long-lasting and careful transition (through the creation and implementation of the “seven stages of roadmap to democracy”). It awaked Myanmar’s national self-respect, solved the crisis and proscribed the Chinese of Myanmar. As Myanmar seek to escape from China’s dependence, the US immediately takes its opportunities, not only in Myanmar, but also for the entire “Pivot” policy to Asia - Pacific.

Certainly, there are many difficulties for both the US and Myanmar, but they have fully prepared for the return to Asia - Pacific. Myanmar needs the recognition and support of the world, especially the US. Alongside, the “Pivot” policy can regain the American role and influence in the Asia - Pacific region. The US needs to have proper, effective allies and support. Myanmar is a bridge between Northeast India, West and South China, the region of ASEAN and the Bay of Bengal into the Indian Ocean. Therefore, gaining influence in Myanmar will be an important advantage for the US to continue to promote the “Pivot” policy to Asia - Pacific, regaining its dominance and creating a balance of power with other great powers, including China.

As a result, Myanmar is one of the key points that the US paid attention to in the “Pivot” policy toward Asia - Pacific. When the issue of human rights is resolved, the US’s actual goals with Myanmar are more clearly revealed. Myanmar does not directly approach the Pacific, but the US understands that China’s ambition is not only in the South China Sea, and the Asia - Pacific but also expand to the Indian Ocean through the strategy of “String of Pearls”¹¹, in which Myanmar is an ideal bridge. This is also one of the reason why India boycotted China’s OBOR. The US’ purpose in the “Pivot” is to find a new direction for the development, and ways to refrain from the ambitions that are increasingly exposed by China. Therefore, to applying the “Pivot”, the US considers Myanmar as a hinge, an example illustrating vividly their policy for each country and for the whole Asia – Pacific. The US returns to the Asia - Pacific because it wants not only

¹¹ The String of Pearls is a geopolitical theory on potential Chinese intentions in the Indian Ocean region (IOR). It refers to the network of Chinese military and commercial facilities and relationships along its sea lanes of communication, which extend from the Chinese mainland to Port Sudan in the Horn of Africa. Sea-lane cross-border strategy of the Mandab Strait, the Strait of Malacca, the Strait of Hormuz and the Strait of Lombok as well as other strategic naval interests such as Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives and Somalia (See also: The Washington Times, Monday, January 17, 2005).

to assert its leadership role in the world, but also to control the opponents, find new resources, seek new development directions for its economy.

4. Conclusion

The implication of the semantic transformation from "Return" to "Pivot" and "Rebalance" used by the US is to avoid China's misunderstanding. The way to change this term along with the contents of "Rebalance", clearly demonstrates the "wary", "not strong enough" in Barack Obama's policy toward China. It is hard for China to believe that it is not the "Pivot" or "Rebalance" target. Therefore, the Chinese responses in the Xi Jinping's era proved more aggressive with a higher goal. This is not only due to the American policy, but it also comes from the Chinese real power after the more-than-30-year-reform and opening as well as Xi Jinping's personal imprint. China's reactions toward the US policy shows that Beijing is insight to seize opportunities to increase influence regionally and internationally. It can be seen that the transition from Obama's "Return" to "Rebalance" gave an opportunity for Xi Jinping to put his personal imprint on China's foreign policy in launching Chinese nationalism before the "threat" of the "Pivot".

In fact, China firstly has been quite successful in implementing its foreign policy. The number of members in the "OBOR" and the Chinese strategic projects minimized US's influence, competed with the US, and even attracted some small countries actively participate. In Southeast Asia, where the geopolitical position is important in international relations, fierce competition between the US and China has taken place in many ways. Besides some small countries in ASEAN seem to support China, others have adapted to their foreign policies to minimize negative impacts from the competition of big countries and promote their own advantages in development.

The US is strengthening its presence in the Asia - Pacific with a series of new actions, focusing on three key points: 1) Consolidating and strengthening relationships with traditional allies, through high-level meetings between the state leaders, following by support commitments and joint exercises - especially at sea; 2) Using multilateral forum as a way to approach and enhance the US influence¹²; 3) Paying special attention to the strength of China. China is becoming "a problematic" (See more: Thomas J. Christensen, Sept/Oct 2015), mentioned in every struggled places due to its power and ambition. The US also needs support of countries in the Asia - Pacific based on the

¹² In 2009, when attending the 16th ARF Regional Forum in Thailand, the US signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) and announced its return to Southeast Asia, wishing to strengthen relations with ASEAN countries and restore the role of leadership in the region. Another striking event in 2011 is that, B. Obama became the first US President to attend the East Asia Summit (EAS) in Indonesia. The Obama administration is also actively improving the quality of participating in institutions that the US has participated in such as ARF, APEC... At ARF, the United States has affirmed its desire to address security issues, such as the issue of sovereignty disputes in the South China Sea, for the benefits related to freedom of navigation and a peaceful and stable environment in the area. For APEC, the US believes that this is the most important economic institution of the Asia - Pacific region. In the context, US still trying to escape the crisis, the role of this Forum is increasing in helping to expand exports and increase jobs for the United States. At the Shangri - La Dialogue held in Singapore in June 2012, US Secretary of Defense Panetta issued a plan to consolidate the Obama administration's "Pivot" viewpoint that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton previously announced.

American confirmation of its return to keep regional security and peace and the balance of Chinese power as China is arguing and conflicting with most countries in the region. Currently, although the Donald Trump's expression is different, the US administration continues the Asia - Pacific policy on four main pillars: Consolidating and developing allied relations; Cooperating and controlling China; Participating in regional issues; Promoting trade relations with the region. Therefore, Chinese responses in this region has not changed significantly in the next few years. However, it is possible that competition between the two powers will have changes.

The experience that Myanmar passed in dealing with the US "Pivot" policy will be a lesson for Vietnam in the context of facing many threats of territorial sovereignty and national interests. One of the most difficult problems in Vietnam today is disputes over the sea and islands with neighboring countries - especially with China. Vietnam and the US are trying to avoid talking the past and to promote cooperative relations in many aspects. Vietnam is also particularly focused by the US because of its strategic position. In the context that China and Vietnam are facing serious disputes over the island, the US factor becomes more important to protect national interests and sovereignty. However, dealing with relations with the US and China has always been an unsolvable problem of Vietnam.

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TÓM TẮT**CHÍNH SÁCH “TÁI CÂN BẰNG” CỦA MỸ
VÀ ĐỐI SÁCH CỦA TRUNG QUỐC**

Năm 2011, Nhóm nghiên cứu châu Á tại Bộ Ngoại giao Hoa Kỳ đã “hết sức lo sợ” rằng Bắc Kinh sẽ hiểu việc sắp rút khỏi Iraq và Afghanistan là sự suy yếu nên đã tìm cách để mô tả điều này một cách tích cực hơn, và ban đầu họ đưa ra cụm từ “Quay trở lại châu Á” để diễn tả. Tháng 11 năm 2011, trên trang Foreign Policy, H. Clinton công bố bài *America's Pacific Century*, trong đó bà sử dụng khái niệm “pivot” thay cho “turn”, nội dung bao gồm những tuyên bố và triển khai hướng tới châu Á - Thái Bình Dương, trở thành một trong những nét nổi bật trong chính sách an ninh và đối ngoại của chính quyền B. Obama. Sau những triển khai thành công bước đầu, nhất là khi Tổng thống Obama bay tới Australia để công bố một thỏa thuận cho 2.500 thủy quân lục chiến Mỹ được đóng trụ sở tại Darwin, sau đó ông đã bay đến Bali và trở thành Tổng thống Mỹ đầu tiên tham dự Hội nghị Thượng đỉnh Đông Á, “pivot” trở nên có vẻ không xác định. Nếu Mỹ có thể xoay trục về châu Á, rất có thể nó sẽ dễ dàng xoay đi hướng khác. Washington cần cái gì đó dài hạn và trong vòng sáu tháng “Xoay trục” đã trở thành “Tái cân bằng”. Bài viết này chỉ nêu lên một số điểm đáng chú ý của nội dung “Tái cân bằng” thông qua việc xem xét đối sách của Trung Quốc trong các cấp độ và trường hợp Myanmar.