



The Pacific President

How Obama made the South China Sea a security issue

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ABSTRACT

The South China Sea became in a short time-span quickly heavy militarized. American and Chinese warships are increasingly active in these contested waters. While the G.W. Bush administration focused militarily mostly on the Middle East, Obama re-shifted with the ‘pivot to Asia’ significant military attention to East Asia. This study aims to clarify to what extent Obama legitimized the military component in the pivot through securitization, as proposed by the Copenhagen School. Therefore, several American and Chinese policy documents and speeches are analyzed. The results indicate that, contrary to what the administration claimed, military policies were predominant in the pivot and ‘extraordinary measures’ compared to pre-existing policies. Furthermore, the Obama administration securitized Chinese policies regarding the South China Sea by portraying them as threatening U.S. security, and thus exceptional measures are required. In successfully securitizing the issue, the administration constructed a reality in which Beijing would have to respond, perceiving Washington uplifting the issue to a ‘top security issue’ as credible.

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CHAPTER 1 Introduction

For many years, China did manage to ‘rise peacefully’. Its vast economic development came without the by western scholars anticipated Sino-American clash (Mearsheimer, 2010). Under the tenure of G.W. Bush, the United States and China developed a complex, but pragmatic working-relationship. One could argue, that balance changed during Obama’s first term as president. After one year in office he billed himself ‘America’s first Pacific president’, subtly suggesting that the Bush administration paid too little attention to the Asian continent and that the U.S. should restore their engagement within the region (Allen, 2009). However, tension spiked in the years that followed, over China’s regional behavior in area’s such as the South China Sea (Lieberthal, 2011). Over the course of 2010 and 2011 the U.S. made it increasingly more clear that Beijing had little support to expect from the U.S. in the developing disputes between China and its neighbors. Eventually, the disputed area of the South China Sea quickly militarized and became a highly sensitive issue, with several scholars predicting large conflict (Mearsheimer, 2010).

In 2011 state secretary Hillary Clinton published an article in *Foreign Policy* called ‘America’s Pacific Century’, which is often marked as the embarking of the so called ‘pivot’ or ‘rebalance’ to Asia. In her article, she emphasized the need for increased military presence and explicitly mentioned freedom of navigation in the South China Sea (Clinton, 2011a). The pivot contained various components, ranging from economy to military. However, much debate has taken place whether the military component was predominant. In any case, this military rebalance by the U.S. was met with caution by China, whom started perceiving the whole pivot strategy as an attempt by the U.S. to restrain China. Scholars have argued that this increase in military did antagonize China (Ford, 2017).

This change in military strategy by the U.S. needed legitimization to the public. Why was America re-directing its military towards Asia? This process has been described by the Copenhagen School as ‘securitization’: claiming an issue as a security issue - when done by security-providing actors -, makes it so. Therefore, exceptional measures are allowed (Wæver, 1993). This research will use this specific lens when looking at the ‘pivot to Asia’, since it addresses American China-policies from an unique, constructivist angle. It focuses on how

Obama legitimized his military policies and how this may have constructed a new reality. This evidently leads to the following research question: how did the securitization of China's South China Sea policy by the Obama administration in the 'pivot to Asia' affect Sino-American military relations? This research deliberately chose to focus on policies regarding the South China Sea, since it is a highly militarized and contested area. To address this question thoroughly the succeeding sub-questions are formulated: (1) To what extent were security measures predominant in the pivot to Asia and were these significantly different from pre-existing policies? (2) How did the U.S. legitimize the military component in the pivot to Asia and how was this message perceived by its audience? (3) How did China respond militarily to the securitized measures in the pivot?

To determine the scope of the securitization, this research will include governmental statements, speeches and policy papers by the Obama administration in its analyses. It will focus on the two terms of President Obama, since the pivot to Asia emerged in his first and continued in his second term. Furthermore, this research includes Chinese primary and secondary sources, since it aims to analyze whether China reacts within that constructed reality. By analyzing U.S. documents from the commencement of the so-called pivot until the end of Obama's second term, this thesis is able to give a concise trend analysis in American foreign policy discourse related to China and how this was answered by Beijing.

The case of the pivot of Asia is illustrative for the American foreign policy during Obama. The U.S. withdrew their attention from the Middle East and re-focused on the Pacific. Scholars have argued that the pivot was Obama's biggest mistake in foreign policy (Ford, 2017), while others have stated the likelihood of the situation in the South China Sea developing into a Sino-American war (Kaplan, 2011). This thesis will refrain from political judgement, but merely illustrates to what extent the possible securitization created the current reality.

Ultimately, the aim of this thesis is threefold: contributing to the existing body of literature on securitization theory, academically analyze U.S. policy in regard to the South China Sea and trigger an scholarly debate to what extent securitization in foreign policy might lead to counter-responses (thus creates a new reality). The composition of this thesis is as follows: first this thesis discusses in chapter 2 the literature concerning the pivot to Asia, adopted by the Obama administration. Furthermore it explains how this specific angle contributes to the body of

literature. In Chapter 3 the theoretical foundation is explained and discussed. Chapter 4 discusses the methodology, including the research design and case selection. Chapter 5, the main body of the thesis, entails all three sub questions. By drawing from the work in all the previous ones, Chapter 6 is able to conclude on this thesis's research question.

CHAPTER 2 Literature review

2.1 Context of the pivot to Asia

Barack Obama entered office in a complex time internationally for the United States. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan resulted in a demand for greater emphasis on domestic issues. However, many states in the Pacific region felt a stronger leading role for the U.S. was required (Campbell & Andrews, 2013). Various state-leaders expressed that the U.S. had ignored South East Asian interests for too long (Manyin, Daggett, Dolven, Lawrence, Martin, O'Rourke & Vaughn, 2012). In his 're-balance', Obama rhetorically distanced himself from the prior administration in its Pacific policies (Allen, 2009).

In the years that preceded, China had undergone some significant changes. The under Hu Jintao embraced 'Peaceful Rise' strategy had avoided any significant conflicts by China while the country steadily grew in power, wealth and military might (Ross, 2012). While the first Bush administration was focused on other issues (9/11 and the succeeding War on Terror), the second did manage to establish some remarkable results in Asia; he reduced Sino-Taiwan tensions and started talks that later resulted in TPP (Ford, 2017). Sino-American relations under Bush were also complicated, but they were rather stable and balanced; for example, scholars have used the term 'dual clarity' for the Taiwan issue, trading a ban on force from the mainland by China for no proclamation of independence by Taiwan (Wenzao, 2004). Obama inherited a rather complex, but stable situation in the Asia Pacific.

2.2 The pivot and its implications

Starting as early as 2009, Sino-American relations quickly soured. Incidents with neighboring countries, China backing out the Climate Agreement and the leaked American AirSea Battle strategy, all contributed to a rapid cooling relationship (Ross, 2012). However, rhetorically Obama remained cautious to provoke Beijing and vice versa.

In 2011 the U.S. shifted its Asia-approach. The article *America's Pacific Century in Foreign Diplomacy* by then State Secretary Hillary Clinton is often cited as centerpiece in relation to this new strategy. She projected Asia-Pacific as pivotal for the U.S. interest in the

coming years. The region had become “a key driver for world politics” and Asia’s growth and dynamism was “crucial for the economic and strategic interests of the United States” (Clinton, 2011a). The strategy entailed ‘forward-deployed’ diplomacy, reassuring commitment to the entire continent in open, stable and prospering relations. The U.S. asked an active commitment from their friends in the region, so that all countries can work together to address regional and global challenges. The pivot, or ‘rebalance’, to Asia-Pacific was founded upon six pillars: strengthening existing alliances, improving relations with emerging powers, generating economic prosperity, establishing multinational institutions, promoting universal values and increasing military presence (Campbell & Andrews, 2013). Academic literature agrees on the fact that the pivot is unique in its ‘whole-of-government’ approach (Campbell & Andrews, 2013). The aim is a strategy on all six components and is thus supposed to be carried by several ministries. However, there is no denying in what aspect of the pivot gathered the majority of attention in existing literature. As Brimley and Ratner (2013) point out, the focus on the military component is evident in both the media and academic work. Whether this reflects reality is contested by scholars, but this is further discussed in Chapter 5.

The pivot to Asia by the Obama administration has been widely discussed among academics. Much debate circled around the question whether the ‘Obama doctrine’ continued its ‘deep engagement’ with China or switched to restraint (Löfflman, 2016). This thesis addresses both stances. First, many realist thinkers argue that China has changed its course around 2009 by assertive behavior and bold rhetoric. Therefore, the U.S. should increase its naval force to be able to deter China (Forbes & Talent, 2015). They see a Sino-American ‘zero-sum game’ as almost inevitable (Logan, 2013) and therefore call upon containing China (Mearsheimer, 2006). Containment is a foreign policy doctrine directed to stop the expansion of an enemy. Although that strategy originally dates back to the Cold War era, the debate regained attention with the implemented pivot (Li, 2016). According to Mearsheimer (2010), continued Chinese economic growth would definitely mean that Beijing strived for regional hegemony, dominating Japan and South-Korea (Logan, 2013). These authors tend to forget two things: first, it is far too dangerous to engage with China militarily, since the potential costs are huge, as pointed out by Shambaugh (1996). Secondly, Sino-American trade is one of the largest bilateral ones. Therefore, both countries depend on each other economically (Tellis, 2013). Hence, this thesis argues it is unlikely that the pivot is a concealed strategy to contain China.

Secondly, others have argued the pivot is a grand strategy by Obama to deeply engage China in a web of American dominated international institutions, often referred to as ‘liberal institutionalists’ (Logan, 2013). It is found on the premise that the U.S. cannot clog China’s rise, but should therefore secure China’s behavior through international institutions (Ikenberry, 2012). However, also this view is rejected by this thesis, since it assumes a military balance in the region too easily. Since a possibly crucial part of the pivot are military measures, it would be wrong to assume China would be at peace with U.S. military domination in the region, especially in contested areas such as the South China Sea (Logan, 2013).

This thesis argues that the third line of argumentation, described as ‘balancing’, regarding the pivot is most fitting. On one hand the U.S. is economically profiting from a prosperous China, on the other it is aiming to militarily constrain China of threatening interests of the U.S. or its allies (Tellis, 2013). Also Löfflman (2016) describes the balancing relationship Washington and Beijing conduct. This ‘two-edged sword’ can be problematic in the sense that pushing one side to hard can result in losses in the other (Etzioni, 2013).

However, academic literature fails to provide an analysis on *how* Obama is wielding that so-called sword. Specifically, how is Obama legitimizing military measures that some perceive as anti-Chinese (Campbell & Andrews, 2013), while maintaining a constructive relationship economically. Most scholars have addressed the pivot through a realist lens of power-relations. Therefore, this thesis approaches the existing gap in the literature through the theory of securitization. It potentially explains how Obama is able to use Chinese military policies in the South China Sea as threats to legitimize his own military policies, entailed within the pivot. By constructing a reality in which Chinese policies regarding the South China Sea are securitized (made into a security issue), the Obama administration potentially created the groundwork of Beijing’s reaction within that same reality. Other than assessing the pivot as grand strategy, this thesis analyzes how Obama securitized one part (military) of that strategy.

CHAPTER 3 Theoretical framework

3.1 Theoretical foundations

In this section, the deeper theoretical foundation is outlined. It will first give an overview of where securitization theoretically derives from and how this relates to this specific issue. Furthermore, it will give a detailed analysis on the contemporary body of literature on securitization theory and elaborate more on specific issues within securitization theory relevant for this thesis. It should be noted that it is far beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss all concepts in detail. It is merely the aim to link relevant conceptualizations and ideas within these ideologies to securitization.

3.1.1 Constructivism

The most logical start to analyze securitization theory is constructivism. Constructivism has become a more prominent ideology in IR studies since the 1980s. It draws from various disciplines such as sociology and critical studies, by arguing that the world around us is constructed socially through intersubjective interaction (McDonald, 2008). Both agent and structure are mutually confirmed as constructed. Norms, values and ideas are crucial to determine the current state of world politics. Apart from the Copenhagen School which is discussed later, constructivists did not work dedicate much of their work to security studies. Unsurprisingly, the shared approach among constructivists about security is that it is socially constructed (McDonald, 2008). Thus, security then can be understood as protectionary contour around the values shared by a certain group. But what these values are and how they are protected is context dependent (McDonald, 2002). Security arises through interaction by actors about these issues. In this claim, one can hear the echo of uncertainty about the other's intentions. The perception of regional security in the Pacific Asia, is dependent on the interaction between Washington and Beijing.

Speech act theory

To fully understand the emergence and traditions of securitization theory, a more elaborate overview of its founding is needed. However, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to fully address speech act theory as proposed by Austin and Searle. Consequently, in this paragraph

a brief overview is given of the main foundational features and how this developed into the idea of securitization.

A speech act is a process in which intersubjective messages are passed on. It analyzes how issues or concepts can be perceived as constant, while this was generated through intersubjective processes. A speech act is a “concrete action that is completed or being stated” (Mutimer, 2007). It is based on the concept of *performative utterances* by Austin (1962), arguing that speech act utterances have not only the ability to describe, but also to create reality. Furthermore, the performative utterance exists outside the dichotomy of true or false, or as Austin puts it “truth conditions”. Instead, the performative utterance is subject to *felicity conditions* (felicitous or infelicitous) depending whether the utterances are requests (‘Can you stop interfering with my business?’), declarations (‘Our state is at war’) or warning (‘If you do not stop doing that, there will be consequences’). In applying Austin to security studies, it becomes no longer the question if a speech act is true (or not), but what the speech act *does* (Stritzel, 2007). Therefore, if Obama stresses that freedom of navigation in the South China Sea is crucial to the U.S. national security, he warns possible perpetrators and thus creates that reality, whether American security was in fact endangered or not.

3.2 Copenhagen School & Securitization theory

In this section the current state of the academic debate concerning securitization theory is discussed and outlined. Furthermore this part will address various critiques by scholars in favor and opposing the applicability of securitization theory. This section will include the most recent work by several scholars proposing various pathways towards a demarcated securitization theory. However, this thesis acknowledges the previous difficulties within the academic securitization debate. It does by no means claim to have invented *the* right form of the theory, but merely aims to re-open the discussion in applying both widely accepted assumptions and more contested elements within the theory.

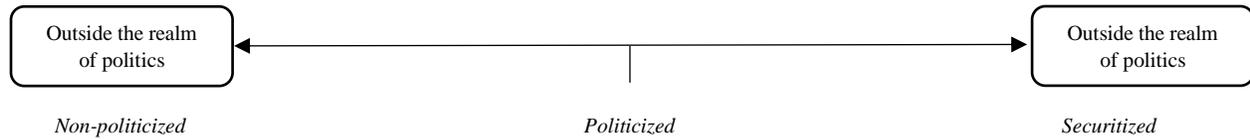
3.2.1 Brief history of securitization theory

The Copenhagen School (CS) was a name attributed to several scholars around Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver from the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute. The core within the ‘school’ is the idea that security relates to world politics. They advocated to enlarge the

interstate-conflict dominated security agendas with issues such as human rights, poverty and climate change. It does not aim to define security as such, but rather looks to what effect security has on intersubjective processes. Securitization as first proposed by Wæver (1993), was the process in which an actor declares an issue, object or other actor an ‘existential threat’ to its own continuation. If this message is accepted by the audience, regular politics or regulations are suspended to be replaced by extraordinary measures to address the perceived threat (Wæver, 1993). The CS adopted a constructivist view that security arises from the negotiation between speaker and audience. Threats are articulated in the form of ‘speech acts’ which is discussed more extensively in the previous paragraph. Thus, if Obama can credibly convey the message to the American public that China’s South China Sea policies are an existential threat, his administration is enabled to respond outside the realm of ordinary politics.

The Copenhagen School further conceptualized the theory by defining the process as: ‘through which an intersubjective understanding is constructed within a political community to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object, and to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat’ (Buzan & Wæver, 2003: 491). The theory is founded on three ‘facilitating conditions’ that determine the success of the securitization: contexts (including the form of the speech act), position of the speaker and historical conditions associated with threat (Wæver, 2000). Speech acts were defined as securitizing moves (Buzan, 1998). However the concept can be applied to other actors than states, the theory has been most often been used to describe the decisions by governmental elites, which will be further discussed at the next part of this chapter. As displayed in Figure 1, an issue can range from non-political (no part of the public debate) to politicized (part of the public debate) to securitized (perceived as existential threat) (Buzan, et al., 1998). Politicizing a subject would be to state its importance to society and put effort in making it part of the public political debate. This is therefore different from securitizing, where it is claimed that the subject is an existential threat and should be dealt with in an extraordinary measure. Therefore it can be argued that if securitization succeeds, the issue moves *beyond* politics (and is no longer political). Thus, security is the extension of politics (Hansen, 2012).

Figure 1. *Spectrum of politicizing*



3.2.2 Criticisms & refutations

However, the theory in this form has received a seemingly endless stream of critique. As Taureck (2006) outlines, they focus around three basic positions: (1) the acclaimed absence of a normative analysis of securitization within the analytical framework of the theory and (2) the current utility of the theory and the applicability of the framework in total and (3) the alleged consequences of wielding securitization theory. Taureck (2006) responds to the claim of absence of moral/ethical norms within the realm of the theory. Most crucially, the critique is in the claim that the analyst can never be neutral in examining security, but rather co-constitutes a new political reality by *choosing* to write about specific themes. Therefore, with this confirmation, the analyst would be co-responsible for this newly created reality. Huysmans (1995) concludes that this is inherent in constructivist approaches to security issues; the ‘normative dilemma of speaking security’. This thesis would embrace the argumentation by Wæver (2000) that the analyst being political or not is subservient; the political choice is already made by the securitizing actor and whether the analyst agrees or not is irrelevant. Therefore, this thesis argues in favor of Taureck (2006) that normative criticism in securitization might be incommensurable. A simple description of security issues is most likely to have a normative component thus it would be better to acknowledge these concerns. Indeed, writing on the possible securitization by Washington, can contribute to that reality, but that responsibility is with the actor rather than the author. However, securitization does, as Wæver (2000) also acknowledges, create a responsibility. Since, if accepted, it would provide the securitizing actor with deontic powers. As Balzacq (2015) points out, this deontic power extends beyond speech act alone if it does create a new reality. Furthermore, the responsibility would not merely be ascribing an effect to an actor; if the securitization process leads to crisis, both the audience as the securitizing actor would be to blame. In other words, if indeed the Obama administration securitized China’s policies and responded militarily beyond the realm of normal politics, for example by unnecessary armament

or provocations to Beijing, and it would indeed lead to conflict, both the administration as the audience were a driving force.

Stritzel (2007) focusses his writing on the second position of critique. He calls for a greater emphasis on the externalist component within the theory, namely the issue of embeddedness. Articulations of security need to be analyzed within their broader discursive context, from which the securitizing actor extracts its performative force. This research would embrace the condition that the speech act itself only has the ability to construct a new reality when its context allows it to. Therefore, securitization has a socio-linguistic and a socio-political component. Stritzel (2007) proposes a model of analysis consisting of three central layers: (1) the performative force of uttered threats, (2) their embeddedness in existing discourses and (3) the positional power of actors able to affect the consequences. In sum, the new framework proposes a less emphasis on the linguist component, but more on the socio-political aspect and contextual sphere. Therefore, this thesis takes the existing Sino-American military relationship into account as well as other contextual developments. It is important to analyze the relation Obama inherited from preceding governments.

The last category of critique is about the consequences of securitization theory. Balzacq (2005) uses the term perlocutionary effects to describe the effects of constructing the new reality for the perceiving audience. As Hayes (2013) also states in his book, the audience fulfills a crucial role in this process. Three elements – selection, legitimation, and implementation of extreme measures – all have real-world consequences. These consequences can go as far as a declaration of war (Balzacq, 2008). However, the securitizing move always has an intended target audience that should accept the action. Balzacq (2005) further examined the concept of audience within securitizing. The importance of the audience is dependent on three factors, according to Balzacq (2015): (1) the frame of reference, (2) its willingness to be convinced, which is linked to the perceived credibility of the securitizing actor and (3) the capability to grant or deny a mandate to the securitizing actor. However, this conceptualization is yet too vague and has to be examined further. At the same time, it is crucial to take into the equation. Some scholars have argued to leave the audience out as element since it is “not an analytical concept at all, but rather a normative concept in analytical disguise” (Floyd, 2011) but this thesis argues in line

with Balzacq (2015) that, however vague, it is crucial within the theory. As he puts it: “keeping the assumption of audience assent in securitization theory bears difficult inference obstacles. But, at the same time, dropping it would be fatal to the process”. However, the literature fails to provide for a clear-cut definition of what the audience *is* and what it *should be*. In showing the effect the audience had on accepting policies, one might conclude the audience is an active agent rather than a *passive recipient*. Audiences in academic literature are often the people (or electorate) of a state, branches of government and sometimes organizations, specific groups within society or states themselves. Due to the scope of this thesis, it will stick to examining one audience capable of granting a mandate (the American public). In this research, all three of Balzacq’s (2015) factors are taken into account, when analyzing the audience. However, this thesis strongly encourages other scholars to further define the ‘right’ audience when looking at securitization processes.

3.2.3 Summarizing

This section has discussed the body of literature on securitization by analyzing its various criticisms and refutations. In weighing the most fruitful contributions to the theory, this thesis has outlined a applicable lens to look at this specific issue. In sum, securitization theory as proposed by the CS is criticized on different accounts, widely varying in contributing value to the domain. This thesis argues similar to Balzacq (2015) that securitization theory has a core construct on which most scholars agree on. However, much like a realm of thought as *realism*, each utterance of the theory should be judged on its own account. Whether a specific adaptation is applicable is dependent on the scientific structure. Nevertheless, this thesis argues in favor of setting the stone carved core assumptions so that this thesis can contribute to the domain in building on previous work. The following three features can be derived from the body of literature discussed previously:

- Threats, when perceived as credible, have the ability to shape a new reality
- The perception of the threat is dependent on both agent and audience
- The new reality only exists within its context

These three rather broad formulated features are important to note for every utterance of the theory. Naturally, there are most likely also scholars that would debate these three features, but these form the core of the theory as proposed by Wæver and Buzan. Balzacq (2015) attempted to combine these basic assumptions with an ideal type of the theory as is presented in Table 1. These findings collide with the key concepts this thesis has discussed above and will use in regard to its research.

Table 1. *An ideal type of securitization.*

-
- Threats are social facts whose status depends on an **intersubjective** commitment between an **audience** and a **securitizing actor**
 - **Securitizing moves** and **context** are co-dependent
 - The drivers of securitizing moves are **knowledge** claims about an **existential threat** to a referent object
 - **Power relations** among stakeholders structure both the processes and outcomes of securitizing moves
 - Securitizing moves are engraved in **social mechanisms** (persuasion, propaganda, learning, socialization, practices, etc.)
 - Securitization instantiates **policy** changes – for example, ‘deontic powers’ (rights, obligations, derogations **exceptional** or otherwise, etc.)¹⁸
 - Securitization ascribes **responsibility**
-

Note: Reprinted from “The Essence of securitization; Theory, ideal type and a sociological science of security” by T. Balzacq, 2015, *International Relations*, 29, p.106

CHAPTER 4 Methodology

In this chapter this thesis discusses its methodological approach to the research. It firstly will discuss the design of its research plan, interlinking all sub-questions which would result in an answer to the main question. Secondly, it discusses the data that is going to be analyzed for each sub-question. Lastly, this thesis discusses how the data will be analyzed and interpreted.

4.1 The research design

This research will approach the pivot to Asia through the lens of securitization: how did Obama legitimize the military component? In Chapter 3 this thesis has discussed thoroughly the theoretical foundation of securitization. In this research, the potentially securitizing actor is the Obama administration, the perceived threat are policies by China regarding the South China Sea and the response at hand is the military component of the pivot to Asia. Lastly, the audience in this equation is the American public which has to accept Obama's military emphasis on the Asia Pacific rather than the Middle East for example.

In the first sub-question this thesis analyzes to what extent the military component is predominant in the pivot. If military policies solely encompasses a minor part within the pivot, it is unlikely that this specific part is securitized and other components are not. It is pivotal to analyze whether the military component is indeed *extraordinary*, or rather an expansion of pre-existing policies. In the case of solely a continuation of years of work, one cannot categorize it as extraordinary and therefore securitized. Buzan, Wæver and De Wilde (1998) argue accordingly that a securitized issue for a longer period of time becomes a politicized security issue and falls back in the realm of normal politics. Therefore, the military component has to be predominant and significantly different compared to existing policies for the issue to be securitized. As will be discussed in the next chapter, scholars differ on this matter. This thesis aims to analyze what efforts have been made by the administration of Obama within the re-balance to Asia, but maybe even more what results were generated from that efforts. This requires a policy analysis on the military efforts within the pivot, but also a historical overview of the legacy Obama inherited from previous administrations and how bilateral military relations during Obama's terms developed.

In the second sub-question, this thesis discusses how the securitizing actor legitimized its extraordinary measures, via speech acts or ‘performative utterances’. Therefore, a case-selection is used and discussed later in this chapter. In analyzing the threats, the three layers proposed by Stritzel (2007) are utilized. Moreover, this thesis leaves room for an analysis and interpretation on the meaning of the performative utterances (speech acts by the Obama administration) to the audience (American public). Policy language can remain deliberately vague, but it is pivotal to decompose the speech acts to their core meaning.

Lastly, it is vital to determine whether securitizing China’s policies, in fact did create a new reality in which Obama’s Chinese counterpart is required to react. Therefore, the third and last will focus on accumulative results of the threats and how Beijing responded within that constructed reality. Thus, giving a similar historical analysis as done for sub question 1, on the People’s Liberation Army (Navy) and the military policies that followed the pivot. Hence, this section will use primary and secondary sources to subscribe that analysis. It is important to note that Beijing is less transparent about military expenditure and strategic policy than Washington, thus this thesis is dependent on a small number of sources available. Nonetheless, if Beijing interprets the speech act by the Obama administration as credible, it might prove a successful securitization. After all, if Beijing does not act within the reality constructed by the Obama administration, the securitization was not perceived credible, thus even if that reality was created for its intended audience (the American public), it does not constitute reality. As discussed earlier, whether the issue is true or not does not matter for the process of securitization, but it does matter for world affairs (Stritzel, 2007).

4.2 The case-selection

Since securitization is a complex process entailing various objects, facilitating conditions and actors, diversity in the selected cases is beneficial to give a complete depiction of the American stance towards China’s policies in the South China Sea. In this dynamic, securitization theory is a suitable theory since it explains how military developments in the region are potentially exploited and framed as threats to a constructed security. The Pacific region is one of the most militarized regions in the world which generates the question how this process is legitimized.

The cases are selected through the above mentioned criteria and with the premise of diversified formats: speech acts, governmental publications and media-outlets. Since it analyzes military relations most sources (however not all) are policy papers by the Department of Defense (DoD). The cases are selected on the bases that the actors are enabled through their position to speak on the relevant affairs and actors. Please find a selection of some of the main sources in Appendix A.

4.3 Discourse analysis

The CS makes its stance quite clear in stating that securitization is studied through discourse analysis (Buzan et al., 1998). Also, CS lets the exact form of the analysis up to the scholar. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the author to determine a less fluid approach to the cases, by setting the perimeters of the analysis. As Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) argue, especially for qualitative research, there is no set procedure for the production of material or analysis. Instead the researched should be custom-made to the specific characteristic of the project. Most importantly, this thesis argues in line with the previously discussed Stritzel (2006), including power, embeddedness and position of the threat or actor in the analysis. This thesis will specifically research linguistic features that construct the discourse and its meaning. In American policy the concept of ‘national security’ is not solely a linguistic construct, but also carries a contextual weight in itself, which is also referred to as the performative force (Buzan et al., 1998). Furthermore, to approach the cases from position of equality, the following guiding questions are used in the analysis:

- Who is the securitizing actor?
- What is the positional power of the securitizing actor?
- Does the text entail the concept of security? If so, whose security?
- Is that security threatened and thus are urgent measures required?
- How is the issue embedded in existing discourse?
- To what extent did the threat contribute in constructing a new reality discourse?
- Are there extraordinary measures taken?

Lastly, it is important to note that social reality cannot be completely captured within discourse analysis, since many social practices are non-discursive (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002).

Consequently, this thesis cannot claim a complete analysis on social relations, but merely the trend how discourse contributed in realization of a new reality.

CHAPTER 5 Case study: the 'Pivot to Asia'

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, this thesis addresses the main questions of this thesis. It uses the pivot to Asia as case-study, to analyze military policies through securitization and draw conclusions on the Obama administrations. This thesis aims to grasp a better understanding of Obama's East Asia military policies and place them in a historical context. As mentioned earlier, the main question is approached via three sub-questions. Each of the three questions contributes to a better understanding and improves the ability to draw conclusions on the main research question.

5.2 Sub-Question 1:

To what extent were security measures predominant in the pivot to Asia and were these significantly different from pre-existing policies?

The pivot to Asia as outlined by Hillary Clinton in her article in *Foreign Policy* had six pillars which would result in a rebalance to Asia. Those are respectively: strengthening existing alliances, improving relations with emerging powers, generating economic prosperity, establishing multinational institutions, promoting universal values and increasing military presence (Campbell & Andrews, 2013). However, various scholars argue that one aspect, the increasing of U.S. military presence, was predominant over the others. Conversely, others have argued that the military component is overexposed throughout media outlets and academic work (Brimley and Ratner, 2013). As militarization is directly linked to the realm of security, it is important to note to what extent this took place. The underlying question is whether the policies implemented under the pivot were a significant break from pre-existing policies by previous administrations. Therefore, this thesis first outlines a brief history of military presence and strategy in the region and includes a contextual analysis.

5.2.1 History of U.S. military and strategy in the Asia-Pacific

The Asia-Pacific has been crucial to the U.S. defense strategy for decades. Just before World War II, the U.S. started its foreign policy strategy of establishing military bases all over the world. A strategy which is meant to signal a warning and demonstrate the military capabilities of the U.S., while asserting military influence in the region it is established (Lutz & Enloe, 2009).

After the Cold War, the US' military focus shifted from the Asia Pacific to the Middle East, which led to a decrease in military presence in the region. Much of the military personnel in Europe and Asia were withdrawn and sent to the Middle East (Appendix B). In 2005, twice as much troops were in the Middle East as in the other regions. Appendix s B and C show clearly how Bush continued the trend of a decreasing military presence in Asia since the 1960s.

However, when entering a new era, strategic objectives changed. These changes are well documented in the *Global Defense Posture Review* of 2004. It emphasizes the importance of the U.S. forward presence of military forces overseas. Since the Department remains uncertain about possible risks, the U.S. national security “requires bases within and beyond Western Europe”. Key themes are to expand existing alliances and build new partnerships, create greater operational flexibility, focus on *all* areas of the world, develop fast deployable capabilities and update the existing military capabilities (USA Department of Defense, 2004).

G.W. Bush' foreign policy was evidently dominated by 9/11. In years that followed, Bush (intentional or not) got dragged into a spiral of events that led to the war in Afghanistan and invasion in Iraq. During his administrations, the absolute amount of military spending was increased each year (Appendix D and E). In the *National Security Strategy* of 2002 it is stated that “the war against terrorism has proven that America’s alliances in Asia not only underpin regional peace and stability, but are flexible and ready to deal with new challenges” (Bush, 2002 p. 26). On China, Bush states the following:

The United States relationship with China is an important part of our strategy to promote a stable, peaceful, and prosperous Asia-Pacific region. We welcome the emergence of a strong, peaceful, and prosperous China. The democratic development of China is crucial to that future. Yet, a quarter century after beginning the process of shedding the worst features of the Communist legacy, China’s leaders have not yet made the next series of fundamental choices about the character of their state. In pursuing advanced military capabilities that can threaten its neighbors in the Asia-Pacific region, China is following an outdated path that, in the end, will hamper its own pursuit of national greatness. In time, China will find that social and political freedom is the only source of that greatness. (Bush, 2002, p. 27)

It is interesting to note that in the midst of an invasion in another region, President Bush does not shrink from using strong language in regard to the Chinese militarization. Furthermore, criticizing China in pursuing advanced military capabilities carries an assumption of bias, since U.S. allies such as South-Korea followed the same trajectory, supported by Washington. He later emphasizes successful bilateral cooperation on several transnational issues between the U.S. and China, but then continues:

There are, however, other areas in which we have profound disagreements. Our commitment to the self-defense of Taiwan under the Taiwan Relations Act is one. Human rights is another. We expect China to adhere to its nonproliferation commitments. We will work to narrow differences where they exist, but not allow them to preclude cooperation where we agree. (p. 28)

Wenzao (2004) wrote that the Taiwan issue was the most crucial one in Sino-American relations under Bush. In that respect, he created a contested, but stable trade-off, referred to as ‘dual deterrence’: no use of force by China and no proclamation of independence by Taiwan. Stuart (2012) adds by saying Bush was more pragmatic in regard to Taiwan compared to Carter or Reagan. As long as the balance remained, he might be optimistic that China could play a role in a post-Soviet international order. In sum, Bush had a complex but relatively stable relationship with China.

5.2.2 Implemented policies in the pivot

As noted earlier, the pivot was unique in the sense that it proposed ‘a complete package’ strategy for the region. Scholars have claimed that the military component was the predominant factor in the pivot (Xiang, 2012; Manyin et al., 2012). This section analyzes to what extent these policies were dominant and if they were significantly different from those of the previous administration.

As mentioned, the military part of the pivot was at least the most visible and the most highlighted in academic work and the media. The tone was set from the start in 2011, when Obama held a speech in front of the Australian Parliament, stating: “I have directed my national security team to make our presence and mission in the Asia Pacific a top priority. As a result, reductions in U.S. defense spending will not—I repeat, will not—come at the expense of the

Asia-Pacific” (Obama, 2011). It is unsurprising that the U.S. felt threatened in their military hegemony within the region, since China had an annual average growth of 11.8% in military spending and is suspected to surpass the U.S. in defense spending by 2035 as shown in Figure 2 (although that percentage recent years has been reduced to around 7%) (Brimley & Ratner, 2013).

Figure 2. *Projected military spending China and the U.S.*

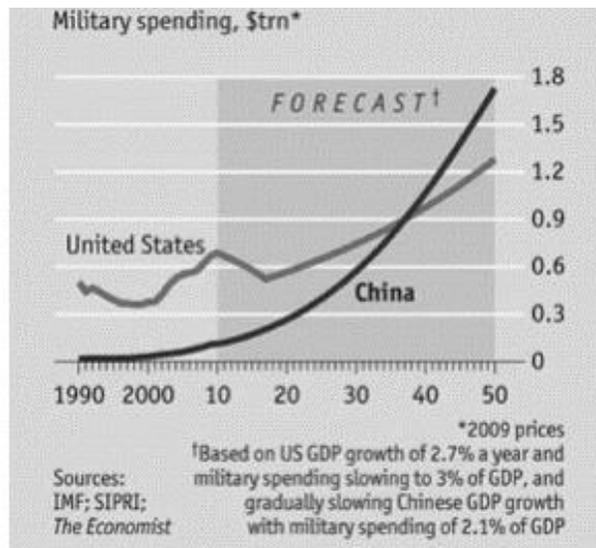


FIGURE 1. “China’s Military Rise,” The Economist, April 7th 2012. Source: <http://www.economist.com/node/21552193> (color figure available online).

Note: Reprinted from “San Francisco 2.0: Military Aspects of the U.S. Pivot toward Asia” by D. Stuart, 2012, *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, 39:4 p. 207

The American Congress reported, that much of the pivot was a continuation of previous policies, but there are some rather strong changes in the military sphere. To increase military presence Obama announced a new troop deployment of 2,500 men in Australia, a navy vessels rotation in Singapore and an intensified military cooperation with the Philippines (Pennington, 2012; Manyin et al., 2012). As Congress also writes, this number of force is relatively small, especially when compared with the troops deployed in the Middle East. Furthermore, Appendix F gives a selection of military cooperation efforts executed by the U.S. and several regional states, but also these are relative minor issues. According to Shambaugh (2013), the rationale for this small scale measures on the short scale is the following: as mentioned, the U.S. military was already well-

established in the region, long before the Bush administration. Despite China's rapid military modernization, the U.S. still far outreaches China in terms of military resources (Stuart, 2012). Thus, the renewed military presence and bilateral military cooperation by Washington in the region is hardly revolutionary, but rather a relative shift.

In the policy paper *Strategic Guidance* by the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) (2012) it is proposed to minimize possible budget cuts in the Navy, but rather reduce spending on the Army Ground Forces. That is remarkable, since the U.S. was by then still at war in Afghanistan which requires Army forces, while the U.S. Navy is largely dedicated to Asia. Furthermore, it explicitly mentions the need to counter Chinese anti-access/area denial capabilities (A2/AD). This tendency is also apparent in the previously mentioned Air-Sea Battle doctrine from 2010. In the same year a Chinese official characterized the South China Sea as core interest, to which the U.S. responded that the freedom of navigation is a national security interest (Glain, 2011). China's anti-access capability is a direct possible threat to the U.S. military strategy; to navigate freely throughout the region. Moreover, it has triggered anxiety with regional allies (Holmes, 2016). Anti-access/area denial is crucial in the understanding of Sino-American military relations in the Pacific. Dian (2015) writes, A2/AD is not only a threat to the U.S. or its allies national security. Rather, its threatening the American 'control of the commons'. The commons are defined as air, sea, land, space and cyber domains and command means the control of who is using it. Therefore, a successful Chinese A2/AD domination in the region, would be detrimental to American power projection. In the 2012 Joint Operational Access Concept the projection of power into the region is listed as pivotal in US national interest:

As a global power with global interests, the United States must maintain the credible capability to project military force into any region of the world in support of those interests. This includes the ability to project force both into the global commons to ensure their use and into foreign territory as required. Moreover, the credible ability to do so can serve as a reassurance to U.S. partners and a powerful deterrent to those contemplating actions that threaten U.S. interests. (US Department of Defense, 2012a)

Hence, while A2/AD is possibly not directly threatening physical wellbeing of U.S citizens or its allies and it is moreover years from actually undermining U.S. commitments in the region

(Shambaugh, 2014), the issue of projecting power is portrayed as crucial to U.S. interest. In other words, a counter-measure against China's A2/AD strategy is securitized.

The Air-Sea Battle (ASB) strategy entails a hybrid integrated strategy to tackle A2/AD threats and while Washington claims it is not invented for a specific adversary, most scholars agree its primary focus is China (Stuart, 2012). The Air-Sea Battle doctrine was planned to be implemented even before the pivot, but was merged with it since the strategic objectives complement each other. Also, there has been debate about the budgetary implications. This new concept requires various advanced updates in equipment and material. As outlined in the policy paper by the DoD in 2012, it was proposed to redirect an amount of 268 million USD from Army and Land Marines budget to R&D compartments of the doctrine (Brimley & Ratner, 2013) and the dedication to the strategy by the administration is shown through the total budget allocation: over \$500 billion through 2023 (Kazianis, 2014). That is remarkable, especially since the military budget of the U.S. was reduced every year of Obama's first term (Appendix D). Therefore, one could possibly argue that allocating these kind of resources is prove of successful securitization, since it expanded outside the realm of 'normal politics'. It was made into a security issue.

Overall, the DoD increased the military presence in the region. In 2012, Secretary of Defense Panetta (2012) announced in his speech in Shangri-La that the U.S. would revise its original 50/50 division of Maritime presence between the Atlantic and the Pacific to a 40/60 in favor of the Pacific, planned to be realized by 2020. According to several reports, the U.S. is on schedule. In 2012, estimated numbers U.S. military and civilian personnel in the Pacific were 325.000. By 2015, this number was grown to 368.000. That same year, 55% of the Navy's ships and 60% of the submarine fleet were already based in Asia. Some of its most advanced ships are sent to the region, such as the *USS George Washington*. In Appendix G, a graphic demonstrates the current employment in the Pacific.

Lastly, the Obama administration concluded various security agreements with regional allies. It installed an advanced missile system in South Korea and expanded its military bases in Australia, Japan and the Philippines, for example under the 'Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement' in 2014, where five bases close to the disputed regions in the South China Sea were expanded (Petras, 2016). Furthermore, Obama continued efforts started by Bush to diversify its partners, including India, Indonesia, Vietnam and New Zealand. According to congress, these agreements serve to improve military flexibility and enhance partners' capabilities. However, it is

equally blunt to state “a driving force for these measures is China’s military modernization” (Manyin et al., 2012). Moreover, according to Xiang (2012) American leadership is keen on sensational advertising new military weaponry to deter possible rivals. Taking the earlier statement by DoD about projecting power into consideration, the military American strategy becomes rather clear. It is most likely not looking to clash with China. However, it does want to reaffirm its status as the controlling power of the Asia Pacific, both at home and to its allies.

Therefore, the image is rather clear. However small the first steps were of the military rebalance, the U.S. has planned and approved large steps in the long-term to re-shift military attention to the Pacific region, which include a large increase in resources in times of budget cuts. As Shambaugh (2013) writes, it is not a fundamental shift, since even in the security sphere much is expanding or renewing old policies, but it is a relatively large one. Compared to other components within the pivot, it is safe to say that security initiatives gained a large deal of attention. However, the pivot did achieve more than solely security policy: America strengthened its multilateral cooperation in various schemes, it undertook various diplomatic efforts for better cooperation with neighboring countries and probably most importantly, it concluded efforts started by the Bush administration into the TPP (Campbell & Andrews, 2013). However, the amount of resources dedicated to the security sphere exceeds all the others (Manyin et al., 2012). Looking to what tangible results the re-balance brought, one has to look mostly to the security sphere (Manyin et al., 2012).

5.2.3 Conclusion

In this section an elaborate trend analysis is provided with regard to military policy under Obama and previous administrations. This thesis aimed to outline the legacy Obama inherited from his predecessor in terms of military relations with China. It is important to take this into consideration when looking to possible securitization by Obama; as Balzacq (2015) wrote, it is pivotal to understand the contextual embeddedness of threat texts or speech acts. Therefore, to understand the meaning of Obama’s securitization, we have to understand what preceded.

Returning to the question this section started with: to what extent were security measures predominant in the pivot to Asia and were these significantly different from pre-existing policies?

It would be overstating by claiming that the re-balance to Asia is purely military oriented; there are various diplomatic, economic and political results which derived from the pivot. However, as this section has demonstrated, the security policies gained the majority of the resources and political attention in times off budgetary cuts in DoD spending. This demonstrates the priority the administration has given to this component within the pivot. Therefore, we can conclude by stating that security policies were in fact dominant within the pivot. Furthermore, this section has shown that when placing Obama's security measures within its historical context, one can speak of a relative significant shift rather than a fundamental one. Other than Bush, Obama expanded existing military structures, redirected a substantial amount of deployed navy to the region and struck new military agreements with regional allies. Moreover, it dedicated a military doctrine to battle anti-access/area denial capabilities, which hints towards a warning to Beijing. It is important to note *why* the administration reversed existing policies and placed this much attention on military efforts. Drawing from the statement by the DoD about projecting power, it seems the administration was on one hand reaffirming its supremacy in the region both in the region and at home by partnerships and symbolic measures, while on the other one was indeed updating its military equipment and capabilities. The issue of the projection of power was framed as national interest, and therefore an issue of crucial importance.

Placing these findings under the lens of securitization, we have to look at the rear of the equation: what resulted *from* a possible securitization rather than how the issue was securitized (which will be discussed in the following chapter). Briefly put, can we label the military measures within the pivot as 'extraordinary measures' (Wæver, 1993)? As discussed in the theoretical framework, Hayes (2013) identified three processes in the process of conveying the perceived threat to the audience in securitization that construct the new reality: selection, legitimation, and implementation of extreme measures. Obama and his administration made the selection of the issue quite clear to the public: as Clinton (2011) wrote in her article "Strategically, maintaining peace and security across the Asia-Pacific is increasingly crucial to global progress, [...] through defending freedom of navigation" and later "Today, China represents one of the most challenging and consequential bilateral relationships the United States has ever had to manage". But, maybe even more important, did the administration 'implement extreme measures'? This chapter has argued that Obama's policies were a significant change from pre-existing policies. However, it is questionable whether the term 'extreme' can be used

for the new direction of Obama, since it is for a large part an expansion of existing structures or re-shifting the balance to how military attention was before 9/11. Therefore, this thesis would prefer using the term ‘extraordinary measures’ over ‘extreme’. Moreover, as discussed earlier, securitization is not a binary issue; an issue can range from non-political, to politicized, to securitized (Buzan, et al., 1998). The pivot did entail significant military changes. The policies never took shape in large troop deployments or similar measures, but it did redirect a substantial part of its naval force to the region. Therefore, this chapter concludes by stating that Obama did implement extraordinary measures.

5.3 Sub-Question 2:

How did the U.S. legitimize the military component in the pivot to Asia?

As explained in the theoretical framework, a securitization is dependent on whether that message is received and accepted by its audience. Therefore, this section will outline a discourse analysis, including several governmental policy papers and speeches by both Obama and other cabinet officials. In the analysis specific focus is placed on how military components within the pivot are legitimized as policy. According to Wæver (1995), if an issue is successfully securitized, normal politics are suspended to be replaced by extraordinary measures. In the previous section this thesis concluded that the military policies within the pivot can be characterized as extraordinary to some extent. However, this section will focus on the ‘threat’ that forms the legitimization of these policies.

While the widely cited article by Hillary Clinton (2011) in *Foreign Policy* is often marked as the start of the pivot, this section begins its analysis in 2009 when Obama was inaugurated. Sino-American relations were already changing and tensions with China rose quickly in the years that followed. The structure of this section is as follows; first a policy, or statement is presented in its context. Subsequently, the specific discourse to legitimize this action is highlighted and analyzed.

5.3.1 The build-up to the pivot

In November 2009 by then still Senator Barack Obama visited China to discuss several transnational issues such as trade, climate change and nuclear proliferation. He was the first

American president(elect) to visit China in his first year in office. Yet, during his election, Obama proved himself critical on China, mainly directed towards their economic policy: China is “grossly undervaluing their currency and giving their goods yet another unfair advantage” (Obama, 2008). Unsurprisingly, Obama gained little out of his 2009 trip to China and returned empty-handed despite hoping to reach an agreement on proliferation of Iran (Cooper, 2009). Later that year, when China backed out the climate agreement, the complex Sino-American relationship became more apparent. A crucial event is the 6.4 billion USD arms deal with Taiwan in 2010, which spiked outrage in China. In a reaction, Beijing suspended military visits and placed sanctions on U.S. companies processing the deal. The U.S. Defense Security Cooperation Agency (2010) announced the deal:

This proposed sale serves U.S. national, economic, and security interests by supporting the recipient’s continuing efforts to modernize its armed forces and enhance its defensive capability. The proposed sale will help improve the security of the recipient and assist in maintaining political stability, military balance, and economic progress in the region.

It is important to note that it is explicitly mentioned that this sale is projected to serve the U.S. security interests. The Secretary of Defense Robert Gates goes even further stating that the anti-ship weaponry of China “could threaten America's primary way to project power and help allies in the Pacific -- in particular our forward air bases and carrier strike groups” (Pomfret, 2010). Lastly, that same year Clinton marked the new stance on China vividly in stating that “The United States, like every nation, has a national interest in freedom of navigation, open access to Asia’s maritime commons, and respect for international law in the South China Sea” (Clinton, 2010). It goes without saying that this message was received with concerns in Beijing. The South China Sea was by then already a crux in China’s policies and the U.S. was on all fronts reasserting China’s neighboring countries with competing territorial claims of American support. In the same speech she mentioned “The U.S. is prepared to facilitate initiatives and confidence building measures consistent with the declaration” (Clinton 2010). When she visited Hanoi in 2011, she named the sea ‘the West Philippine Sea’ (Clinton, 2011b), arguably deliberate provoking China.

5.3.2 Securitizing the pivot in the first term

For the pivot itself, this thesis takes Clinton's (2011a) widely cited article *America's Pacific Century in Foreign Policy* as starting point. Elaborately discussed previously, it is also important to note the continuation of previous outlets: "Strategically, maintaining peace and security across the Asia-Pacific is increasingly crucial to global progress, whether through defending freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, [...] or ensuring transparency in the military activities of the region's key players" (Clinton, 2011a). However she also alters conciliatory wordings, the above reads as a clear warning signal, and also as an explanation of a new direction. It was directly followed by the statement by Obama in Australia that cuts in military spending will not come at the expense of U.S. military presence in the region. Overall, statements by government officials in 2011 were of a cautionary nature, emphasizing the need for military cooperation, while hinting Beijing to stop provocations.

In 2012, commentators in the PRC criticized the pivot heavily, stating that the whole policy is a concealed containment strategy of China's interests (Lawrence, 2013). In the strategic guidance paper by the Department of Defense of that year, Obama stated:

We will ensure that our military is agile, flexible, and ready for the full range of contingencies. In particular, we will continue to invest in the capabilities critical to future success, including intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; counterterrorism; countering weapons of mass destruction; operating in anti-access environments; and prevailing in all domains, including cyber (Obama's note in U.S. Department of Defense, 2012).

Explicitly mentioning anti-access warfare is a direct reference to Beijing. Also, a stark message is formulated in that the U.S. will be ready for the full range of contingencies, which can be interpreted as a full-out war.

Over the long term, China's emergence as a regional power will have the potential to affect the U.S. economy and our security in a variety of ways. However, the growth of China's military power must be accompanied by greater clarity of its strategic intentions in order to avoid causing friction in the region. The United States will continue to make

the necessary investments to ensure that we maintain regional access and the ability to operate freely in keeping with our treaty obligations and with international law (U.S. Department of Defense, 2012b, p.2)

It is important to note an important subtle change in rhetoric. Previously, statements mostly included the security of the region as motivator. Here, China is portrayed as an actor who can threaten U.S. *national* security. This functions as the legitimation of policies beyond the ordinary political sphere. Hence, national security is threatened. Furthermore, ‘regional access’ and ‘operate freely’ quite clearly refers to the disputed territories in the South China Sea. Lastly, the paper emphasizes the military rise of China and express its concerns over future capabilities. Thus, another legitimation for extraordinary measures.

States such as China and Iran will continue to pursue asymmetric means to counter our power projection capabilities, while the proliferation of sophisticated weapons and technology will extend to non-state actors as well. *Accordingly, the U.S. military will invest as required to ensure its ability to operate effectively in anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) environments.* (U.S. Department of Defense, 2012b, p. 4)

Later that year, the U.S. concluded a deal with Japan to install an advanced missile-defense radar system on Japanese territory. It spiked outrage in the public debate in Beijing. The territorial dispute around the South China Sea fast-tracked spiral down in 2012 (see Appendix H). Several incidents in 2012 in violation of international law in which Beijing was often involved, put the atmosphere on edge (Kaplan, 2014).

5.3.3 Securitizing the pivot in the second term

After re-election, the pivot to Asia continued. The formerly classified Air-Sea Battle strategy was made publicly in 2013. In short, the concept was completely dedicated as an operational approach to an A2/AD (anti-access/area denial) environment (Callaway, 2014), which most scholars interpret as an anti-Beijing strategy (Ford, 2017). Obama’s now former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, mentions bluntly in his memoirs that China’s militarization poses a threat to the U.S. national security. He states that their military capabilities are “designed to keep U.S. air and naval assets well east of the South China Sea and Taiwan” (Gates, 2014). Thus, he

implies that China is arranging their military specifically around keeping U.S. forces away from free passage. With that, U.S. interests are at stake.

However 2013 disputes in the South China Sea continued, bilateral Sino-American relations improved slightly. In June, Obama hosted Xi Jinping in California for their first lengthy talk. Topics to be discussed were cybercrime and the territorial disputes. Joseph Nye stated it was “the most important meeting between an American and Chinese president, since Nixon and Mao”. Although results of the meeting were arguably slim (Sanger, 2013), it is consistent in a new chapter within the pivot policy. Various scholars have argued Obama took a more pragmatic approach in his second term, reducing strong rhetoric and being more focused on the other compartments of the pivot-strategy. It is widely assumed he wanted to re-build an constructive relation with Beijing (Sutter, Brown, Adamson, Mochizuki & Ollapally, 2013; Saunders, 2014).

Yet, incidents within the South China Sea continued. In 2014, while radar satellites showed China’s efforts to build artificial islands, Obama signed a 10 year US-Philippines Enhanced Defense Co-operation Agreement, including troop and ship rotation in the Philippines. He stated:

Deepening our alliance is part of our broader vision for the Asia Pacific. We believe that nations and peoples have the right to live in security and peace, and to have their sovereignty and territorial integrity respected. We believe that international law must be upheld, that freedom of navigation must be preserved and commerce must not be impeded. We believe that disputes must be resolved peacefully and not by intimidation or force [...]Let me be absolutely clear. For more than 60 years, the United States and the Philippines have been bound by a mutual defense treaty. And this treaty means our two nations pledge -- and I’m quoting -- our “common determination to defend themselves against external armed attacks, so that no potential aggressor could be under the illusion that either of them stands alone.” In other words, our commitment to defend the Philippines is ironclad and the United States will keep that commitment, because allies never stand alone (Obama, 2014).

It is quite clear that if Obama actually wanted to change tone, he did not succeed vigorously. The above has several references to China: territorial integrity, international law, freedom of navigation and the depicted intimidation. He closes with a full-scale threat to possible aggressors that war with the Philippines will mean war with America. Later that year, a U.S. Navy aircraft is

intercepted by the Chinese and the Philippines conduct a joint military exercise with the U.S. In 2015 the DoD published the policy paper *Asia-Pacific: Maritime Security Strategy*. The paper starts off immediately expressing the importance of freedom of navigation while simultaneously stretching the concept:

Freedom of the seas, however, includes more than the mere freedom of commercial vessels to transit through international waterways. While not a defined term under international law, the Department uses “freedom of the seas” to mean all of the rights, freedoms, and lawful uses of the sea and airspace, including for military ships and aircraft, recognized under international law. Freedom of the seas is thus also essential to ensure access in the event of a crisis. Conflicts and disasters can threaten U.S. interests and those of our regional allies and partners (USA Department of Defense, 2015, p.2)

This statement is pivotal, since this utterance of discourse seems a perfect fit for securitization: freedom of the seas is now loaded with far-reaching extra dimensions. Now, the usage of freedom of the seas is a requisite for U.S. national security, because it is “essential in the event of a crisis”. Therefore, anyone who obstructs the freedom of the seas (free passage in the South China Sea) is as of now threatening U.S. security. It re-emphasizes the U.S. security interest in the matter again while simultaneously subtly hinting to China’s obstructive behavior: “As the maritime security environment continues to evolve, this task is becoming more challenging. But there should be no doubt that the United States will maintain the necessary military presence and capabilities to protect our interests and those of our allies and partners against potential threats in the maritime domain” (Department of Defense, 2015). Further, it strongly emphasizes the need for parties involved in the territorial dispute, to take international law (UNCLOS) in consideration. On the militarization of China’s navy the following is mentioned:

Although preparation for a potential Taiwan conflict remains the primary driver of Chinese investment, China is also placing emphasis on preparing for contingencies in the East and South China Sea. China sees a need for the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) to be able to support China’s “new historic missions” [...]. (USA Department of Defense, 2015, p. 10)

It is noteworthy since it asserts Beijing's intentions for its audience; China is militarizing for a conflict with Taiwan (thus this is to be expected), but also readies to fight anyone in the seas (while it is previously mentioned the U.S. has a strong presence there) in new *historic* missions. By linking this grandiloquent statement to a navy force that is preparing for contingencies, an image rises of a battle of unprecedented proportion is coming. The paper then announces several important deployments of some of its most advanced ships and building new ones to the region in the next 5 years to "protect the ability to respond decisively", increasing the total number of ships by 30% (USA Department of Defense, 2015). Harris, a senior navy officer stated the following alongside Carter, the new Secretary of Defense: "We want to cooperate with China in all domains as much as possible, so we have to have a view, and I have a view of cooperation where we can, but we have to confront them if we must." (Freedberg, 2016). Carter himself called the region "the most consequential region for America's future" and therefore military presence was of "fundamental strategic importance to our country". According to Carter, the U.S. is going to "sharpen its military edge" (McKirby, 2016).

5.3.4 Conclusion

Overlooking almost two terms by Obama, this thesis concludes the following in regard to securitization. The U.S. at first seemingly tried to refrain from choosing sides in territorial disputes, but over the years the anti-Beijing rhetoric within speeches and governmental publications became progressively apparent. Freedom of navigation became key subject for the U.S. foreign policy in the Asia Pacific, thereby pointing out that rules should apply to all, subtly referring to China, who does not play by the rules according to U.S. standards.

Moreover, the pivot were not only words on paper. The legitimization of these security measures followed one of two pathways: (1) either stating the dedication of the U.S. to its allies and the dependence on the U.S. for a safe region, or (2) emphasizing that a Chinese controlled region was threatening the national security. The second one is slightly paraphrased, but rooted in the argumentation that the U.S. should always be able to navigate freely throughout the region in maintaining its national security. Therefore, Beijing's claims over territorial waters were threatening the U.S. interest.

The main critiques from the audience (the American public) in securitizing the pivot, was that Obama's harsh policies could have led to a more assertive China and that the Asia Pacific took too much of Obama attention as opposed to other regions (Manyin et al., 2012; Ford, 2017). However, overall the pivot was never resisted on large scale such as the invasion in Iraq by the previous administration. Obviously, the pivot never resulted in armed conflict, but came disturbingly close at times. It is notably that Obama changed the Asia Pacific region into a top military priority, without getting too much resistance. One could argue that the constant depiction of the pivot to Asia as crucial for national security did succeed in transferring that message.

5.4 Sub-Question 3:

How did Beijing respond militarily to the securitization of the pivot?

For the last sub-question, this thesis solely focuses on the military response by Beijing. If Obama succeeded in securitizing Chinese policies regarding the South China Sea, he created a reality in which China has to respond. Scholars have linked the development of the 'New Silk Road' as a counter response to the American pivot (Clark, 2010), but this section will solely analyze the military aspects of China's policies, rather than diplomatic or economic initiatives. It should be noted that this thesis will refrain from discussing whether the Beijing leadership perceived the pivot as containment or not, but rather analyzes *how* Beijing responded to the pivot militarily and strive to place that historical context. As mentioned before, Beijing is less transparent on military documents and therefore the number of sources for this section is limited.

5.4.1 The modernization of the Chinese army

The modernization of the Chinese military (PLA) dates back to several decades before the pivot. Already during the 1970s the leadership in Beijing realized China needed to update its military capacity to become a modern military force. It encompassed all four components of the army; navy, air force, strategic missile force and ground army (Blasko, 2005). Moreover, as Scobell and Nathan (2012), the PLA has served as more than a fighting force, often responsible for political and economic responsibilities. The modernization of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) stands out as a particular trend, motivated by several developments. As presented in the white paper *The One-China Principle and the Taiwan Issue* (2000) by the Chinese State Council's Taiwan Affairs Office, deterring Taiwan formed a key driver to modernize its navy. However, coinciding with the 'go-out strategy' to encourage

overseas enterprises during the 1990s, China must have realized the need for naval capacity to project power across the seas (Lim, 2011), while also adjusting to potential conflict close to its borders, with most likely opponent the United States in case of a Taiwan conflict (Scobell and Nathan, 2012). According to Lim (2011), the large acquisition of submarines can be seen as a preventive measure to address a possible U.S. intervention. Furthermore, as the same article shows, Beijing realized already in the 1970s, when territorial disputes began over the East and South China Sea, that the PLAN must be ready to assist when necessary (Scobell and Nathan, 2012). Lastly, Beijing must anticipate an U.S. intervention with a possible blockade of the Malacca Strait, through which most of China's oil is imported (the so-called 'Malacca Dilemma') (Cheng, 2015). A response to this scenario was the development of the previously discussed anti-access /area denial strategy (A2/AD) (Scobell and Nathan, 2012).

The modernization of China's navy took off during the mid-1990s and accelerated in the 21st century. It entailed a broad array of weapons acquisition programs, such as anti-ship ballistic missiles, submarines and surface ships. In a detailed report by O'Rourke (2017), he describes thoroughly how China in short time took on an all-encompassing modernization strategy for its navy. Several of its major improvements were implemented after the publishing of Clinton's article, announcing the re-balance to Asia. However, while China is vastly modernizing its military capacity, the U.S. still has larger military budgets and a superior military presence in the South China Sea. China spends roughly \$150 billion on military while the U.S. spends almost \$600 billion. Appendix I and J depict the same image; China spends relatively less compared to their GDP on military than the United States. However the Chinese budgetary request in 2017 for military was an increase of 7% , it is the lowest increase in 7 years due to a stagnating economy.

5.4.2 The Chinese response to the pivot

One month after Obama's inauguration in 2009, Chinese media reported intensively an interception of an American surveillance ship. While the U.S. was monitoring the Chinese military for a longer period, never did China take such drastic steps on account of its proclaimed sovereignty (Zhao, 2015). Since then, China's foreign policy is often described as 'a new assertiveness' by U.S. analysts (Putra, 2015). However, as Johnston (2013) points out, this rhetoric lacks inclusion of previous stances by China, and are mostly based on seven incidents that happened in that period (such as the previous discussed Taiwan arms deal in 2010, or

labelling the South China Sea as ‘core interest’). While several of these seven incidents are attributed to an earlier foreign policy (‘old assertiveness’), the South China Sea issue does illustrate a new policy direction. China undertook more military patrols, more risky action to protect fisheries and hardline rhetoric towards other claimants. However, depicting the Beijing’s complete foreign policy as newly assertive, would be false (Johnston, 2013).

In assessing the Chinese reaction to the pivot, it is important to distinct government officials, high-profile commentators and low-level commentators. Or as Swaine (2012) does, authoritative, quasi-authoritative and non-authoritative. Focusing on the former, public reaction to policies regarding the pivot were rare and relatively restraint, while quasi- and non-authoritative assessments were far more alarming and suspicious towards the United States. However, a shared counsel by all was restraint and caution rather than ‘assertive *realpolitik*’ (Swaine, 2012). Nevertheless, it is quite clear Beijing is somewhat suspicious about the motivation behind some parts of the pivot, such as the projected 60% navy presence and interference with territorial disputes (Atia, 2016).

As mentioned, China did employ a ‘new assertiveness’ in regard to the South China Sea. Starting onwards from 2011, China clashed multiple times with neighboring countries concerning fishing ships, warships and monitoring instruments. In 2014 the Philippines brought China in front of the Permanent Court of Arbitration concerning the legality its ‘nine-dotted line’ sovereignty claim (see Appendix H). Around that same time China started building artificial islands in the Spratly and Paracel island groups. In 2015, Beijing published its first defense white paper focused exclusively on strategy. Whereas it also continues previous efforts of ‘active defense’ it now also emphasizes high-sea offensive naval operations. More importantly, the South China Sea’s territorial disputes were now classified as ‘core interest’ (Woody, 2015). However Johnston (2013) states that this is founded in miscommunication, it did find its way back to U.S. analysts and government, and is a key example of a securitization. Claiming it as ‘core interest’, one automatically commits to full dedication. The assumption that, not following up on core interests, would mean an ‘existential threat’ is easy to make. China stated the following on the matter in its white paper:

On the issues concerning China’s territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests, some of its offshore neighbors take provocative actions and reinforce their military

presence on China's reefs and islands that they have illegally occupied. Some external countries are also busy meddling in South China Sea affairs; a tiny few maintain constant close-in air and sea surveillance and reconnaissance against China. It is thus a long-standing task for China to safeguard its maritime rights and interests (PRC Ministry of National Defense, 2015).

Reading between the lines, it is clear who is meant by 'external country'. The paper also calls to prepare for 'military struggle' in China's water backyard. It is unsurprising that in this Chinese 'speech act' the emphasis is more on sovereignty than on the American side, since potential conflict would be close to Chinese borders, but more importantly, because of the role sovereignty plays in Chinese foreign policy. The paper makes it also clear that China will continue to further develop its naval capacity in the future to be able to deploy its force further from home. It is also notable that the paper changed the traditional 'active defense' (strike back when you are hit) to a more pro-active stance:

In line with the strategic requirement of offshore waters defense and open seas protection, the PLA Navy (PLAN) will gradually shift its focus from 'offshore waters defense' to the combination of 'offshore waters defense' with open seas protection, and build a combined, multi-functional and efficient marine force structure" (Johnson, 2015).

While this shift in military policy is significant, it is important to note that 'offshore water defense', defending China's territory close to its borders such as the South China Sea, remains the primary focus of the PLAN. Already in the defense white paper of 2004, the PRC stated the following:

While continuing to attach importance to the building of the Army, the PLA gives priority to the building of the Navy, Air Force and Second Artillery force to seek balanced development of the combat force structure, in order to strengthen the capabilities for winning both command of the sea and command of the air, and conducting strategic counter strikes (Information Office of the State Council of the PRC, 2004)

Offshore defense, or as it is labelled by the Pentagon, A2/AD, is the joint strategy of the PLA to stop potential approaching hostile forces far from the mainland (anti-access), or deny already closely stationed forces (such as the U.S.) operational action (area-denial) (McDevitt, 2016). China has been building new ships in an incredible (or one might say ‘extraordinary’) pace. Clark and Wilson (2017) add that China’s shipbuilding priorities confirm the assessment that it will stay focused primarily on its near seas, but might shift more resources towards far sea capabilities in the long-term, especially in the context of the newly proposed Maritime Silk Road initiative (McDevitt, 2016).

Over the course of 2016 incidents over the South China Sea between China and the U.S. continued. Various scholars agree that at least a part of China’s military strategy is designed to cope with a possible U.S. conflict (Clark & Wilson, 2017; Xiang, 2012). However, this does not mean China is looking for conflict. As Zhao (2015) argues, both Washington and Beijing are adjusting to a new power-relationship, where conflict must be avoided, but interests are defended.

5.4.3 Conclusion

This section has given a historical analysis of the modernization of the Chinese military, so that policies regarding the South China Sea can be seen in its historical context. Without this analysis, it is hard to separate pre-existing policies from responses to the pivot. It has described the differences in public opinion over various layers of society (quasi/non-authoritative and authoritative). This is important, since the positional power of the actor making the ‘threat’, is a key component (Stritzel, 2007). Furthermore, this section has provided an overview of specific policies that can to some extent be attributed as a response to the American pivot.

China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) has gone through a rapid modernization since the mid-1990s. However other factors have played a large role in this, possible conflict with the U.S. came rather quickly on the agenda. Since the pivot, Chinese foreign policy has been described often as a new ‘assertiveness’. However, for several cases this assertiveness is hardly new, but date back in its original doctrine of sovereignty. Nonetheless, its increased actions in the South China Sea *are* a shift from previous leaderships. China’s leadership refrains from too stark accusations, but condemns the U.S. in similar phrasing in the accusation of breaking the rules (Needham, 2017). At the same time, Chinese opinion-makers, media and army officials do make more bold claims, such as the likelihood of war being ‘a reality’ (Sanger & Davis, 2015).

The modernization of the navy dates back to before Obama's tenure and therefore is not a response to the pivot. Nonetheless, China has increasingly turned its modernization towards a force that might be ready for conflict with the United States, especially through its A2/AD strategy. Furthermore, when China published its defense white paper in 2015, Washington interpreted China's claim in the South China Sea as one of its 'core interests', and therefore vital to its status quo. Additionally, Beijing made it clear it is preparing for expansionist navy employments (open seas). In sum, possibly by mistake, China acted within the newly constructed reality by the Obama administration, which uplifted China's military policies regarding the South China Sea as security issue.

CHAPTER 6 Conclusion & discussion

The main objective of this research was to research the approach by the Obama administration towards re-establishing military force in the Asia Pacific. The so-called pivot to Asia is a significant aspect in the foreign policy of two terms served by Obama. Scholars have claimed it was his biggest mistake, others have praised his efforts to assure allies in the Pacific of American support. From the offset, the military component within the pivot found its way easier to the media and academic literature than other compartments. Instead of assessing the ‘grand strategy’ by Obama, this research addresses the way the Obama administration legitimized the military component within the pivot and if this was exceptional in its context. Therefore, this thesis utilized securitization theory, debating if Obama lifted threats into the security realm to legitimize exceptional measures. Furthermore, it applied this theoretical lens to discuss how discourse is able to create a reality in which the counterpart (China) now also has to operate.

This thesis has argued that the military component was in fact predominant in the pivot; especially during the first years. The military component outreached other aspects such as economy and diplomacy in terms of resources and attention. Coinciding with China looking to expand its sphere of influence, both governments had a dual balancing relationship: economically cooperating, while militarily competing.

Chapter 5 first provided the contextual analysis in terms of military policy in the region; what situation did Obama inherit from his predecessor and to what extent are his policies within the pivot exceptional? The change in military policy implemented by Obama was a significant break; re-directing deployed navy to the region, update material and conclude various military agreements with neighboring countries. The administration made sure the cuts in military budgets, did not come at the expense of military re-balancing to Asia. If a securitization is successful, an actor would be able to implement ‘extraordinary’ measures (Wæver, 1993). Therefore, in the hypothesis that Obama securitized Chinese policies to implement the pivot, these policies within the pivot had to be ‘extraordinary’. Hence, how would it otherwise differ from regular politics? Taken the historical context (‘embeddedness in existing discourse’) in consideration of the Obama administration, this thesis has concluded that Obama did implement ‘extraordinary measures’.

Furthermore, this thesis analyzed the legitimization of these measures in speeches and publications by the administrations. In these outputs, legitimization is provided through an existential threat to U.S. interests. It is interesting to note that Chinese policies regarding the South China Sea are articulated through various threats by the administration: China's growing military capabilities, accusations of breaking international law, threats to the U.S. projection of power, claimed commitment to regional allies and most notably, the freedom of navigation are exploited in legitimizing Obama's securitization. As stated, some of these developments (like the military modernization) date back from far longer than the pivot, but still are portrayed as urgent threats that have to be dealt with in a timely manner, fitting perfectly within securitization theory (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). These threats are conveyed by actors in a position of power. Whether these accusations (or speech acts) are true or not is irrelevant. By stating that U.S. security is being threatened, the administration created that reality (Stritzel, 2007).

Lastly, this thesis has strived to outline the military developments on the Chinese side. As stated before, by constructing a new reality through discourse and non-discursive measures, one obliges the other to act within that same reality. While modernization of China's navy has various drivers and started long before the pivot, most scholars agree that there is at least a component within Chinese maritime strategy that adjusts to possible Sino-American conflict (for example in the A2/AD strategy). It proves that also China reacts within the reality that Washington has constructed, namely that China's South China Sea policies are a top-security issue for the United States. Therefore, the securitization is not only credibly conveyed to the intended audience (the American public), but also to the Chinese counterpart, which responds in its turn in that same reality.

In sum, this thesis has argued that Obama did securitize South China Sea policies of China. It aimed to contribute to the body of literature on securitization theory, U.S. foreign policy and Sino-American military relations. It hopes to trigger a renewed debate on the utility of the theory, by applying it to worldly issues. Lastly, it has analyzed a part of Obama's foreign policy through a unique angle. While he did manage to re-balance to Asia, Obama was never the first American 'Pacific President' and there will most likely never be one.

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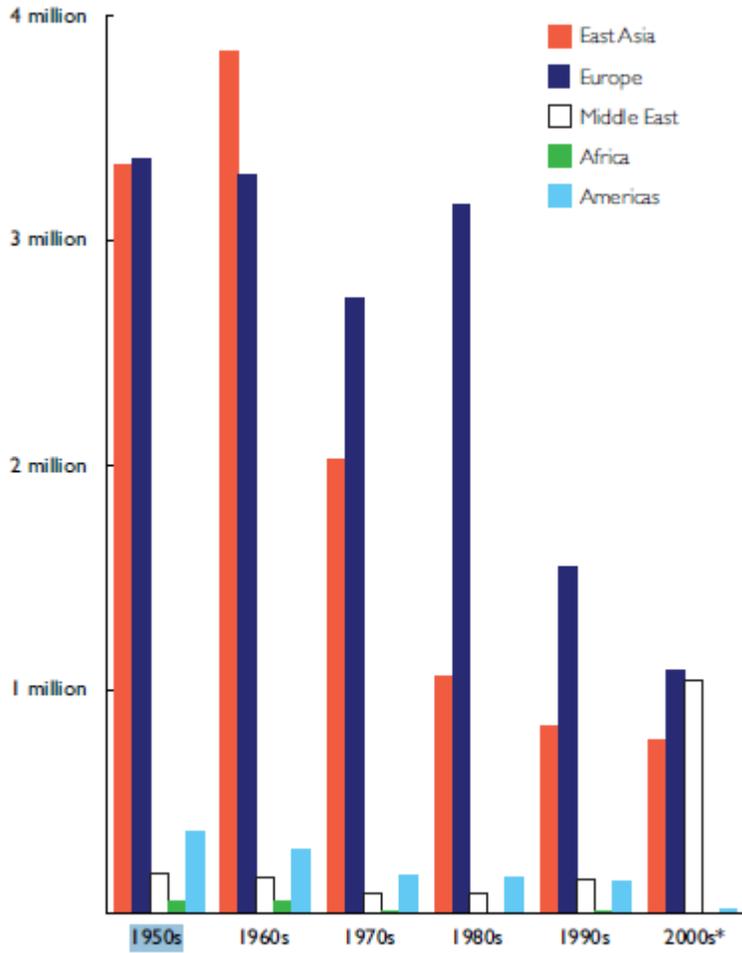
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Selection of sources for discourse analysis

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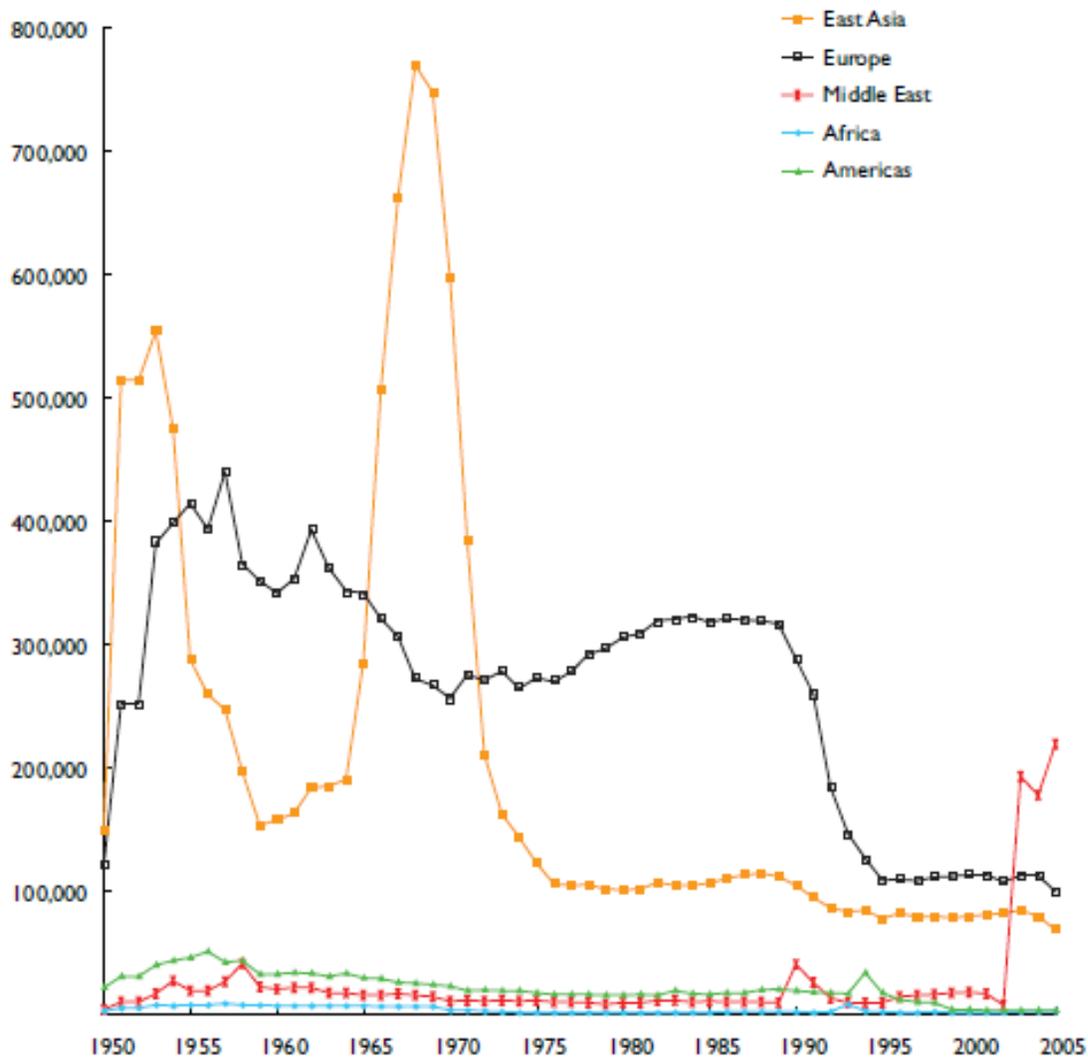
Appendix B: U.S. Troop Deployments by Region and Decade



*Values for 2000s are extrapolated based on data for 2000-2005.
Source: Heritage Foundation calculations based on annual records from U.S. Department of Defense, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports.

Source: Heritage Foundation

Appendix C: U.S. Troops Overseas 1950-2005, by region



* Data for 1951 and 1952 are estimated.

Source: Heritage Foundation calculations based on annual records from U.S. Department of Defense, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports.

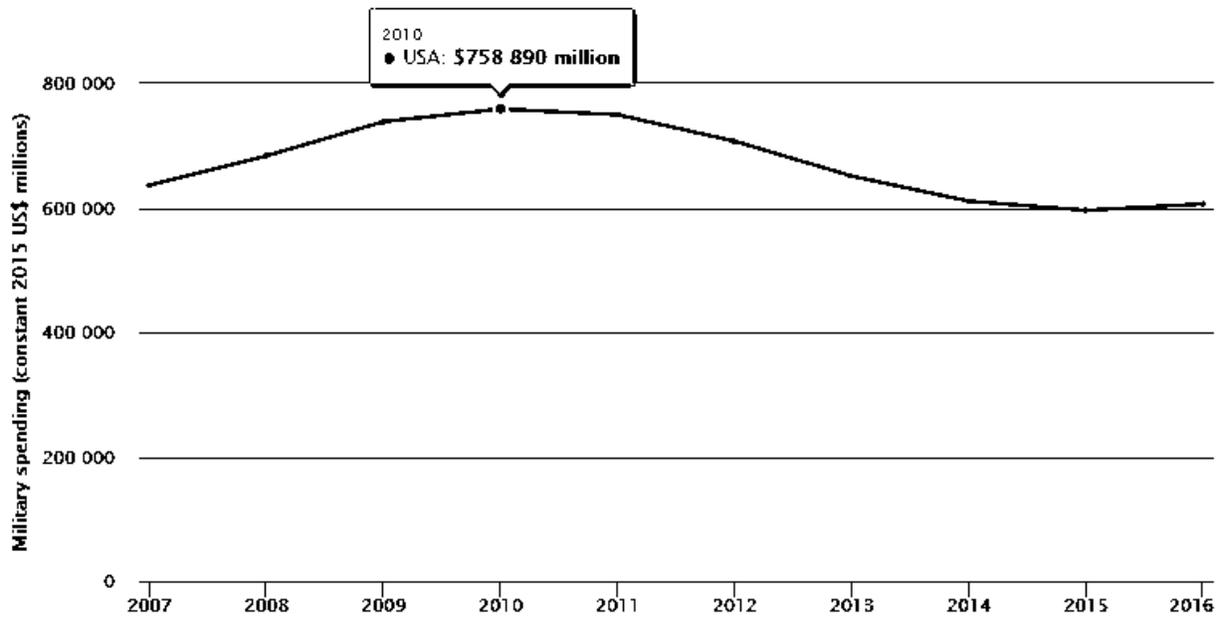
Source: Heritage Foundation

Appendix D: United States military spending in millions USD

YEAR	AMOUNT
1996	410141
1997	408020
1998	398803
1999	399787
2000	415259
2001	418631
2002	470042
2003	534984
2004	583090
2005	610898
2006	620387
2007	636674
2008	683776
2009	738621
2010	758890
2011	749533
2012	706918
2013	650851
2014	610636
2015	596010
2016	606233
CURRENT	611186

Source: World Bank Data

Appendix E: Military spending U.S. by year in million USD



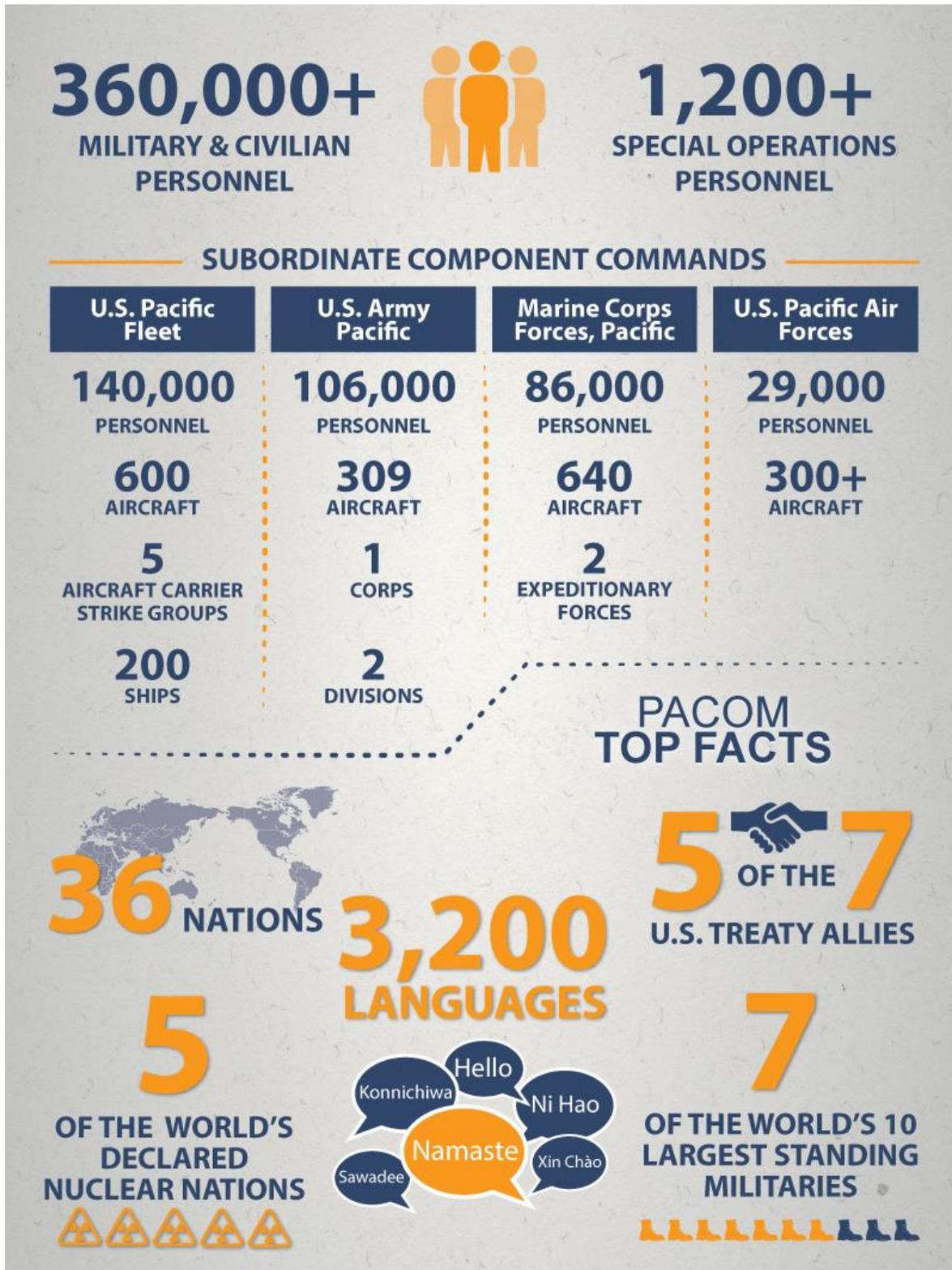
Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)

Appendix F: Selection of Department of Defense Capacity Building Efforts in Southeast Asia

	Initiative	Authority	Timeframe
Indonesia	Ministry of Defense Technical Expert.	Section 1081 Ministry of Defense Advisor Program (MoDA)	Arrived March 2015
	Integrated Maritime Surveillance System (IMSS): 18 coastal surveillance stations, 11 ship-based radars, 2 regional and 2 fleet command centers (\$51M) Note: FPMF provided sustainment and integration in following years.	Section 1206 of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for FY 2006, as amended (Section 1206)	Funded FY2006-2008 Delivered 2011
	Reform of defense planning, defense strategy, and budget development and execution system and processes.	Defense Institution Reform Initiative (DIRI)	2013 to present
	Upgrade TNI Bell helicopters and Navy Special Forces Equipment, including 12 RHIBs (\$27M).	Section 1206	2010 funding, RHIBs delivered 2012
Malaysia	Integrated Maritime Surveillance System: 8 coastal surveillance radar stations, 28 small boats and associated maritime interdiction training, Joint Regional Command Center (\$42M).	Section 1206	Funded FY2007, 2008, 2011 Delivered 2010-2011
Philippines	National Coast Watch Center (\$19M).	Cooperative Threat Reduction Program	2013-2017
	Coast Watch Radar System.	Section 1206	
	Reform of defense planning system.	DIRI	2005-2012
Vietnam	Provision of WMD detection equipment; improved communications; construct coast guard training center; maritime security workshops (\$21M).	Cooperative Threat Reduction Program	FY2014-2015
	Law enforcement, advisory, and boat maintenance training (\$405K).	Counternarcotics and Global Threats Authority	FY2014-2015

Source: Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy, Department of Defense (2015)

Appendix G: Current U.S. Pacific Command at a glance



Source: Department of Defense

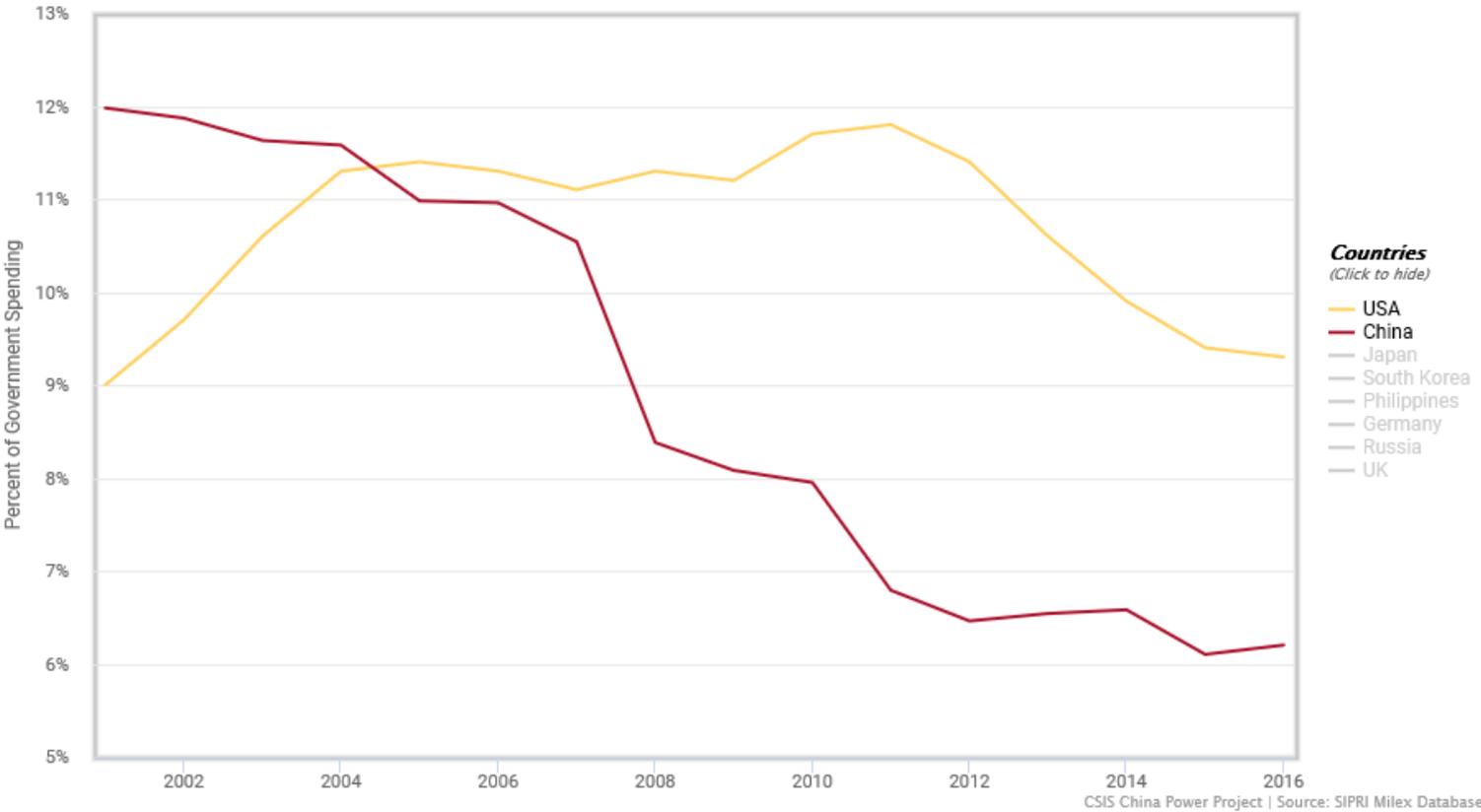
Appendix H: Territorial claims in the South China Sea



Source: Financial Times

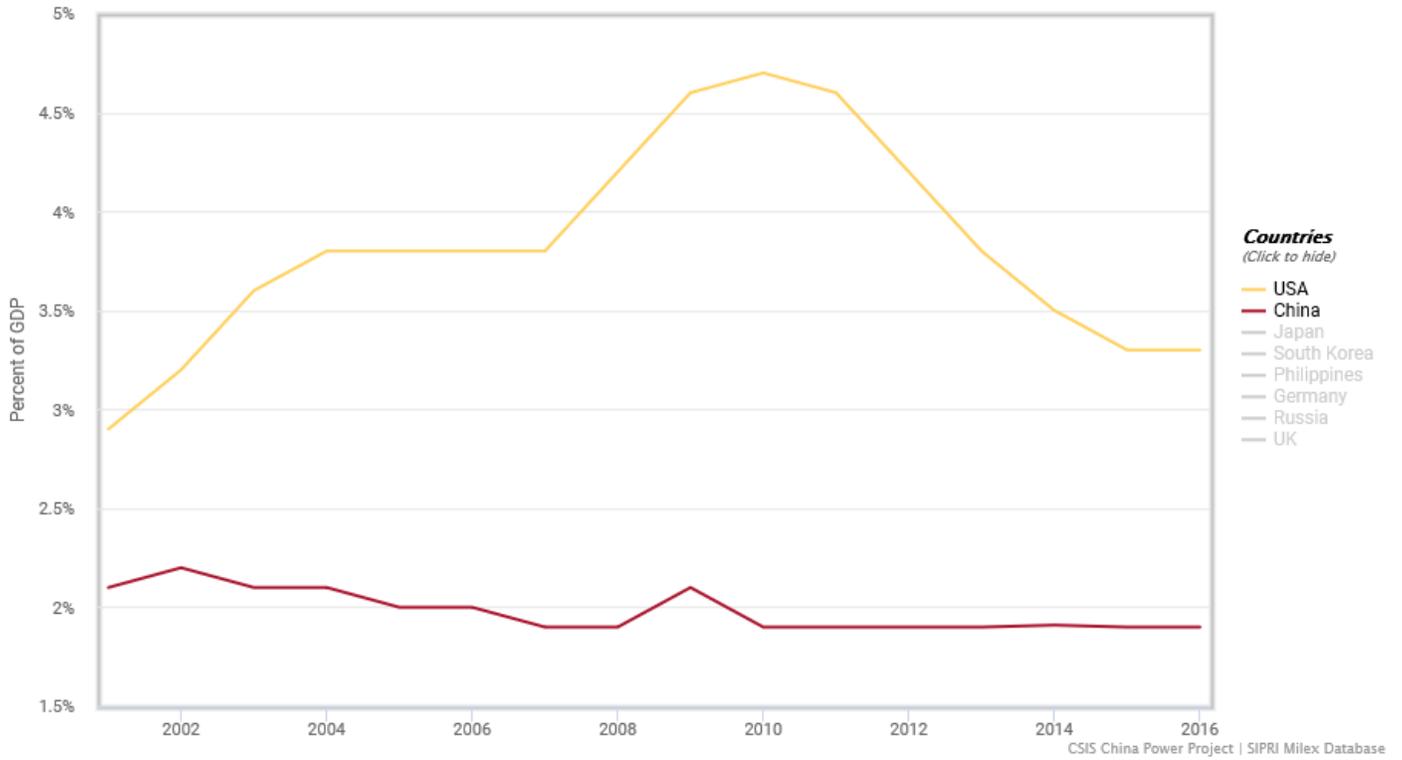
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Appendix I: Military Spending as Percentage of Government Spending of the U.S. and China



Source: SIPRI Milex Database

Appendix J: Military Spending as Percentage of GDP of the U.S. and China



Source: SIPRI Mlix Database