

# **Chinese Media and United States Rebalancing Policy to Asia: The South China Sea Dispute and North Korea Nuclear Program**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This paper aims to examine Chinese media perception toward US rebalancing policy to Asia which many perceive mainly to contain the rise of China and thus potentially create instability in the region. This paper treats media as a factor contributing to the dynamics of China's perception and policies toward the US based on the well-established theories on the relations between media and foreign policy and the increasing importance of media in China. This paper fills the gap in the existing literature which solely focus on the discourse of US rebalancing policy rather than the manifestation of this policy. Using the case study of the South China Sea Dispute and North Korea Nuclear Program, this paper argues that Chinese media perception varied across cases in which US rebalancing policy is perceived to be more destabilizing in cases relate directly to China's sovereignty such as the South China Sea. In testing this hypothesis, this paper adopts qualitative method of content analysis of several Chinese media to see the variation of Chinese perception across cases, compare these perceptions with those adopted by the government and draw conclusion by discussing the finding and the implication of United States rebalancing policy in its relations with China and regional stability in general.*

**Keywords:** *Media Perception, China, US Rebalancing Policy to Asia*

*Artikel ini bertujuan untuk melihat persepsi media di Cina terhadap kebijakan rebalancing to Asia oleh Amerika Serikat yang bertujuan untuk mengimbangi kebangkitan Cina dan oleh karenanya berpotensi menciptakan ketidakstabilan di kawasan karena persaingan keduanya. Artikel ini melihat media sebagai salah satu faktor yang berkontribusi terhadap dinamika persepsi dan kebijakan Cina ke Amerika Serikat berdasarkan landasan teori hubungan media dan kebijakan luar negeri dan meningkatnya peran media di Cina. Artikel ini mengisi kekurangan dalam literatur yang sebagian besar fokus hanya pada diskursus kebijakan rebalancing to Asia Amerika Serikat dibandingkan manifestasi kebijakan tersebut. Dengan menggunakan studi kasus sengketa Laut Tiongkok Selatan dan program nuklir Korea Utara, artikel ini berargumen bahwa persepsi media Cina bervariasi dari satu kasus ke kasus lain ketika kebijakan rebalancing to Asia cenderung dipersepsikan membuat ketidakstabilan dalam kasus-kasus yang berhubungan langsung dengan kedaulatan Cina termasuk kasus sengketa Laut Tiongkok Selatan. Dalam menguji hipotesa ini, artikel ini mengadopsi metode kualitatif analisa konten beberapa media Cina untuk melihat variasi persepsi masyarakat Cina terhadap kasus-kasus tersebut, membandingkannya dengan persepsi pemerintah, dan menarik kesimpulan dengan mendiskusikan temuan dan implikasi kebijakan rebalancing to Asia dalam hubungannya dengan Cina dan stabilitas kawasan secara umum.*

**Kata-kata kunci:** *Persepsi Media, Cina, "US Rebalancing Policy to Asia"*

The United States rebalancing policy to Asia as announced in 2011 has changed the strategic balance in both East and Southeast Asia, particularly, because it occurred concurrently with the rising Chinese power in the region. On the one hand, United States rebalancing policy helped stabilizing the region in the way that it gave security assurance for regional states against the perceived Chinese growing assertiveness in the region. On the other hand, it destabilized the region as it increased the competition between China and the United States as the two biggest powers in the world. The future trajectory of regional stability, in this sense, depends on how China perceives the more significant United States presence in its immediate neighbors.

Against this background, this paper aims to examine the role of Chinese media as a factor that contributes to the dynamics of China's perception and policy toward the United States. Even though domestic explanation has been overlooked as a determinant of a state's foreign policy, there are at least three reasons why focusing on media is useful to understand Chinese foreign policy. First, the existing literature has established relationships between domestic factors, including the media, and foreign policies of a particular state (Putnam 1998; Moravcsik 1993; Rise-Kappen 1991; N. Rosenau 1961; Shirk 2007; Wang and Wang 2013; Yu 2005). Similar with "the flow of influence" of public opinion, the influence of media to foreign policies also has "top-down" and "bottom-up" aspects (Rise-Kappen 1991). The first refers to media's function in *orchestrating* public opinion to support government policy toward other states, while the latter *represents* public opinion in pressuring the government to take a particular policy (Wang and Wang 2013). Theoretically, media serves both as a tool and a control for the government in the foreign policy making process.

Second, the empirical data also indicates the growing importance of media in China's foreign policy. Since the reformation in the 1980s, the decision-making process in China has moved to a more "horizontal authoritarianism," which allows more participation from broader actors including non-government (Zhao 1992). As David Lampton said, the decision-making process in China has undergone "four -izations", meaning "professionalization," "corporate pluralization," "decentralization," and "globalization" (Lampton 2001). It is within this more visible and more participative process that media found its increasing leverage in China's foreign policy. Moreover, media in China has been privatized since the 1980s, and thus encouraging the growth of Chinese media both in terms of quantity and quality (Shirk 2007). In terms of the previous, for example, Chinese newspapers have increased from only 69 in 1979 to 2000 newspapers in 2005 (Shirk 2007). Meanwhile, in terms of the latter, Chinese media has become increasingly competitive in offering top stories to the audience in order to maintain profitability (Shirk 2007). Chinese media, in this sense, has the ability to shape public opinion, or even nationalism, that eventually affects the government's foreign policy.

Particularly with the rise of new media, public has more space to express their opinion toward the government. Compounded by the rise of China that encourages more people to pay attention on international issues, media has got a higher place in China's foreign policy making, through its indirect role in facilitating and shaping these public preferences (Wang and Wang 2013). Even more, China's government itself has begun to consult media and public opinion in formulating its policy. There have been cases where government's websites have discussion forum for the public, or even the government officials themselves engaged in online discussions with the public (Lu 2005). Mutual interactions have begun to flourish between media, public, and the

government in crafting foreign policies, even though they are still in the nascent stage.

Lastly, there are also considerations on the sensitivity and the importance of China-United States relations for China and the Chinese, which made any development in their relations always attract public attention. Chinese people have a long history of “anti-Americanism” since the arrival of American missionaries in China and continued through the first and the second World Wars where the United States helped Japan and nationalists respectively (Li 2005). In the current era, Chinese anti-Americanism has become more apparent in every conflict or disagreement between the two, such as United States bombing of Chinese Embassy in Belgrade in 1999 and the EP3 Incident in 2001 (Li 2005). With the rise of China as the second most powerful state, national pride has grown in the side of the Chinese that led to more pressure on the government to be assertive against the United States and to recover from their so-called “Century of Humiliation.” Moreover, the United States is currently involved in various issues that relate closely to Chinese nationalism and national interests, such as Taiwan, Japan, Korea, and maritime territorial disputes in both East and South China Sea. Therefore, China’s foreign policy toward United States often received significant pressure from the public; and the media, in this sense, is crucial in determining the stability of public opinion and nationalism of the Chinese people.

To test the hypothesis, this paper uses qualitative method of content analysis of several Chinese media. Attention will be given particularly to Global Times as one of the most read newspaper in China, with circulation reaching 1.35 million readerships in 2011 (Velker 2011). Its focus on international news and its feature that allows more comments and opinion from readers are useful in establishing a valid analysis on China’s perception toward the United States. Despite of widespread criticism to this newspaper as being pro-government and promoting ultra-nationalism, Global Times, like other commercial newspapers, also has attempted to balance between adhering government regulations and presenting compelling news in order to reap revenues (Shirk 2007). More importantly, the government itself turns to Global Times to see the ‘social weather’ of the Chinese people together with their preferences (Shirk 2007). As Susan Shirk recounted her questioned to a Chinese official on public opinion in China, the latter said that they refer to “Global Times and the Internet” as their sources (Shirk 2007). Contrast to democratic states, where the leaders concern more on the opinion of the majority as the potential voters for their election, leaders in authoritarian states concern more on the opinion of the vocal segments of the society that potentially disturb political stability and legitimacy of the leader (Shirk 2007). That being said, Global Times remains among the most influential media that has the ability, not only to shape public opinion but also to have its view being considered by the government.

In order to minimize any potential bias from this choice, this paper also examines other media to a lesser extent, such as China Daily and Sina.com. China Daily is chosen because it has significant number of circulation and profitability. Even though it is a state-owned newspaper, it still has some degree of independence. This paper also includes sina.com considering the fact that it is one of the most popular websites in China and has an online forum for the public to express their opinion.

To better elaborate, this paper is divided into three parts. The first part will provide the background information on United States rebalancing policy to Asia. The second part will then examine Chinese media response to this rebalancing policy. It will take two case studies of United States policies during the pivot, one that is related directly to

China's sovereignty and the other is linked in a less direct manner. The former uses the example of the South China Sea dispute, while the latter uses the case of the US alliance with the Republic of Korea (ROK) in response to North Korea's nuclear program. By this, it is then apparent if the proposed hypothesis is correct, that Chinese perception toward the United States is varied along the line of its strategic interests. The following section will in turn examine the China's government's policy in both cases to see how far they follow the line of media perception. Finally, the last section will conclude by discussing the finding and the implication of United States rebalancing policy in its relations with China and regional stability in general.

### **U.S Rebalancing Policy to Asia**

The beginning of United States Rebalancing Policy to Asia could be discovered when the current President Barack Obama came to office in 2009. His predecessor, President George W. Bush, has spent almost an entire decade waging war on terror in the Middle East up to the point where the U.S seemed to have exhausted all of its resources, yet they have not come any closer to the end of the war. In fact, U.S go-it-alone policies often invited criticism, if not frustration or resentment both at home and in other parts of the world. Therefore, with the financial crisis hitting the United States in 2008 and the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan, at least, has become more stable, Obama slowly withdrew its troops from the region, and instead, refocused its foreign policy to other region that has more immediate stakes for United States national interests (Manyin 2012).

It is against this background that United States eventually announced its rebalancing policy to Asia at the end of 2011. As planned in a report to Congress, there are several considerations for the strategic shifting to Asia that was previously known as the pivot (Manyin 2012). The first was the consideration over Asia's fast-growing economy (Manyin 2012). Excluding the United States, Asia has the three most populous countries in the world, and thus made up the biggest potential market for the United States. In fact, Asia ranked as the biggest import and the second biggest export for the U.S market (Manyin 2012). Therefore, Asia is a key asset for the United States to recover its economy and to achieve its goal of "doubling export by 2015" (Clinton 2011).

The second and the most important is definitely the rise of China as the second most powerful countries after the United States (Manyin 2012). China's military also become the second most powerful by the end of the 2000s (de Castro 2009). The possibility of China rivaling, or perhaps, substituting the United States is even more significant than ever. Moreover, China has been widely perceived to be more assertive in its disputes with various neighboring states, many of them are United States allies. The additional fact that the United States has significant stakes on the security of the sea-lanes of communication and the stability of its market in the region, the United States has even more reasons to rebalance its foreign policy to Asia.

The center of this rebalancing policy itself is the six major initiatives that involve "strengthening bilateral security alliances," improving the "working relationships with emerging powers," "engaging with regional multilateral institutions," "expanding trade and investment," "forging a broad-based military presence," and "advancing democracy and human rights" (Clinton 2011). While its economic policies are more of a continuation from the previous administration, its military policies introduced



new aspects that have created a discomfort in the United States – China bilateral relations (Manyin 2012). The provision of expanding military presence, for example, was manifested in the United States plan to expand its naval presence in the region up to half of the total United States naval forces (Griffin 2012). In addition, the U.S also increased its troops in Australia, enhanced its naval ships in Singapore, upgraded the existing security alliances with the Philippines, Japan, and South Korea, and expanded its partnership with almost all Southeast Asian states plus India (Clinton 2011). United States policies in this sense have strengthened the allegation that its rebalancing policy was essentially directed against China. Moreover, the United States also developed Air Sea Battle capability that clearly aimed to penetrate China's Anti-Access Area-Denial (A2AD) in the region (Manyin 2012).

### **The South China Sea Dispute**

The case of the South China Sea disputes is a prime example where the changing course of United States policies under rebalancing seemed to be apparent. Prior to this policy, the United States has maintained its neutrality in the dispute that started in the 1970s. After withdrawing their forces from Vietnam and closed its naval base in the Philippines, United States involvement in the dispute has decreased. In fact, when China occupied the Philippines' claimed Mischief Reef in 1995, the United States did not notify the Philippines even though it had prior knowledge on China's activity in the disputed territory (Storey 1999). Instead, the United States argued that the dispute was not included in their Mutual Defense Treaty signed in 1951, and thus it had no obligation to protect the Philippines in the case of China's attack (Storey 1999).

However, when the disputes arose in 2007 and China began to demonstrate its growing military power that also resulted in the incident with United States reconnaissance in 2009, the United States began to reconsider its position in the dispute. Even though it repeatedly affirmed its neutrality, in practice, the United States has been actively supporting regional states against the so-called China's assertiveness. Begun with Hillary Clinton's declaration in 2010 that the United States "has a national interest in freedom of navigation, access to Asia's maritime common, and respect for international law in the South China Sea," United States rebalancing in the following year sought to revitalize its military alliance with the Philippines as a key partner in the region (Landler 2010).

After the establishment of Cooperative Security Locations (CSLs) as new "bases" for United States military, the United States and the Philippines negotiated the expansion of United States military forces in the former territory (de Castro 2009). In addition, the United States also transferred naval ships to help modernizing the Philippines' navy, increased its military aid, and intensified joint naval exercises in the South China Sea (Associate Press 2013). In fact, it was during this exercise and using this newly transferred ship that the Philippines noticed Chinese incursion in its claimed territory, which eventually led to the two-month standoff in the Scarborough Shoals in 2012. United States support to the Philippines, however, is not only limited to military assistance. In terms of diplomacy, the United States continuously support the Philippines' stance including its effort to raise the dispute to the International Arbitration (U.S. Department of State 2014). This viewpoints contrasts to its criticism against China's actions that its perceived as unilaterally establishing Sansha District, increasing fishing bans, and asserting claims to almost the entire South China Sea through its nine-dashed line map (Braningan 2014; Xinhua 2014). More important,

the United States began to speak about its willingness to “help” and “protect” the Philippines that it refused to do in the 1990s (Associate Press 2014).

It is also interesting to note that even though Philippines is the only United States ally in the region, the United States also extends its support to other claimant states, even to those states that it has “limited” bilateral relations, such as Vietnam. Sharing historical animosity during the two-decade war in from the 1950s to the 1970s, both countries only normalized their relations in 1995 and the United States has only lifted its armed embargoes in 2016. Since the rising tension in the South China Sea and United States rebalancing policy, however, the relations between the two has increased considerably. Begin with a more modest form of strategic dialogue, both countries signed a new “Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Defense Cooperation” in 2012 and upgraded their bilateral relations to comprehensive partnership in 2013 (Hiep 2013) (Scott 2012). The United also increased its naval exercises with Vietnam and boosted its military assistance to \$18 million in 2013, a number that is more likely to increase in the forthcoming years (Wroughton 2013).

With Malaysia who has had a good relation with China for the most part of the dispute, the United States also found its momentum to strengthen its security cooperation. China’s sudden turn to the Southern part of the Spratly has been a wake-up call for Malaysia that no negotiation might exist even between good friends when it comes to sovereignty issues. Malaysia thus began to balance against China, and it is to the United States that it turned to, in order to strengthen its military base near the disputed territory. The recent development, therefore, has witnessed both countries cooperating to establish Marine Corps to strengthen Malaysia’s position in the dispute (Mahadzir 2013).

### **North Korea’s Nuclear Program**

The South China Sea is definitely not the only case where the United States adopted a rather different policy during the rebalancing. The second case, North Korea’s nuclear program, also provides a good example of the changing United States policies in the last five years. Prior to rebalancing, the United States adopted a “strategic patience” to refer to its “disengagement” in any talk regarding North Korean nuclear program (Delury 2013; Synder 2013). The first reason behind this policy was the United States preoccupation in other more pressing foreign policy issues, such as China’s rising, Iran’s nuclear program, and United States financial crisis (Delury 2013). The frustration over North Korea’s nuclear program after less successful efforts by the previous United States government also led to a growing assumption that the North might never end its nuclear program, and thus the United States should not risk anything against the provocation from the North (Delury 2013). These, together with the deteriorating health condition of Kim Jong Il as the single most important person in North Korea, increase the belief that the state might somehow “collapse” in an immediate future (Delury 2013). Therefore, the United States did not have to do anything but to wait until the day would come.

This strategy, turned to be more of a wishful thinking of United States foreign policy makers. North Korea tried to explode South Korean corvette in the latter’s territorial waters and fired artilleries to South Korean Yeonpyeong Island in 2010 (Delury 2013). Even after the death of Kim Jong Il a year later, Korea did not indicate any sign of

collapse. Instead, it reconsolidated its power under the new leadership of Kim Jong Un, who is also the son of Kim Jong Il. The United States, had no choice except to resume its engagement with the North.

United States strategy under the rebalancing policy toward North Korea is three-fold. The first is resuming bilateral talk with North Korea where they both agreed on the so-called “Leap Day Deal” (Delury 2013; Synder 2013). This agreement essentially reflected the willingness of North Korea to temporarily halt its nuclear activities in exchange of United States foreign aid (Myers and Sang-Hun 2012). However, this strategy is failed because it diverged from the second United States strategy to strengthen its military alliance with the South. United States rebalancing gave more attention to its alliance with the South Korea that it called as the “linchpin of peace and stability in Asia Pacific” (Cha 2013). After North Korean provocation in 2010, both states intensified their joint military exercises in the peninsula. These moves were the reasons that the North eventually abandoned their agreement with the United States throughout 2012-2013, North Korea launched rocket mission, resumed their nuclear activities, disconnected the strategic line of communication with the South, and prepared missile attacks (New York Times 2013). The United States responded by urging more sanctions from the United Nations, boosted its defense capabilities, and launched a “long-range mission” near the North Korean territory (New York Times 2013). It was only because South Korean changing attitude toward a more reconciliatory approach, as well as U.S third strategy of engaging China to put more pressure on the North, that the latter was willing to begin negotiation and lowered the tension in the peninsula (Cha 2013). Even so, arm skirmish reoccurred between the two Korean, indicating the instability of the situation.

### **Chinese Media Perception**

Chinese media has diverse perception regarding the ‘discourse’ of United States rebalancing policy as well as its ‘manifestation’ in the two case studies of the South China Sea and North Korea’s nuclear program. In terms of the overall discourse of United States rebalancing policy, Chinese media perception can be categorized into three distinct subjects related to how they perceive United States intention, how they see the credibility and the possible impact of these policies, and what China should do in response to this rebalancing.

In regards to the credibility and possible impact of the rebalancing, the general opinion in the media agreed that, to some extent, it would constrain China and the bilateral relations between the two (Jingjing 2012). Some opinion also goes as far as arguing that it might create instability as occurred to the Middle East after United States invasion of Iraq and its involvement in regional affairs (Xudong 2013). However, many agreed that in general the impact of United States rebalancing would be limited. They use the term “no longer work”, “exaggerated”, “not likely to make great changes”, “limited”, “little impact”, to even “embarrassing”, to describe their pessimism over what they prefer to call as United States “eastward shift” (Gang 2011).

The most often cited reason is definitely the recent United States financial crisis and the cut on defense spending, which raised questions on the sustainability of United States policies in the region (Yiwei 2013). Other reason is the consideration of China’s rising that provides an even more pessimistic view over United States influence in the

region. They considered that the United States has lost its influence that it enjoyed in the past, while China has filled the gap through its investment in various areas in the region (Yiwei 2013). In fact, it was China who becomes the key driver of economic development on many Asian countries depend for their market and foreign aid (Global Times 2011). After all, as an opinion wrote, “China’s rise stems from economic growth, a trend that cannot be impeded by the relocation of American warship” (Global Times 2013).

Following the above, Chinese media offered three main suggestions for China’s response to United States rebalancing. The first is “simply ignore” this policy and focus on its economic development (Global Times 2011) (Jingjing 2012). China has better “economic tool” and “attractive market” that will invite other countries to lean toward China (Global Times 2011). It is the economic power that provides the comparative advantage for China compare to the United States, by focusing on economic development, it will “simplify many problem” as it is clear whom regional states should rely on when there are two competing powers in the region (Global Times 2011). Second, China may respond to United States rebalancing, but not to be “overwhelmed” (Global Times 2012). Since the United States has comparative advantage in terms of military, China should be careful in responding to United States provocation. China may also cooperate with the United States, but it will be better to begin with non-traditional security issues (Global Times 2012). If the United States threaten China’s interest, then the third option would be retaliation. As an opinion suggests, “China can reduce cooperation with the United States on some global issues” (Canrong 2012).

### **The South China Sea Dispute**

Even though in the level of discourse Chinese media seems to be confident on China’s power and discounting the credibility of United States Rebalancing, in the level of manifestation, Chinese media’s perception is more nuanced across different cases of United States involvement in the region. Judging from United States intention, many Chinese considered United States involvement in the dispute is part of its broader strategy in containing China by imposing a ‘divide and rule’ strategy aiming to separate China from its neighboring states (Global Times 2012; Shicun 2014). In addition, some opinion also accused United States provocation in the South China Sea as an intended action to distract international attention from the plot of Japanese militarization in the East China (Global Times 2012; Shicun 2014).

This negative sentiment is even more apparent in regards to United States actions in the dispute. There are at least three common attributes that the media often uses to represent their perception toward the United States. The first are hegemonic, interventionist, and aggressive (Global Times 2012; Global Times 2013). Even though the United States is the most powerful state in the world, it doesn’t necessarily mean that it can interfere in the affairs of other states. Some Chinese sees United States actions in supporting other claimant states, criticizing China, and asking China to “clarify its claim” are clear examples of United States intervention in China’s affairs with its neighboring states (Global Times 2014). For them, United States is an external actor that has no legitimate basis to intervene in the dispute (Global Times 2012). They suggest that the United States differentiate the South China Sea from the Caribbean Sea that is clearly in the United States backyard and where the United States has already established its sphere of influence (Global Times 2012).



The second attribute is provocative. Chinese media sees the United States as the driver behind the rising tension in the South China Sea (Global Times 2012; Global Times 2014). Prior to United States rebalancing to Asia, the region was relatively stable for the past two decades with China and its neighbors could maintain their disputes through peaceful negotiation (Global Times 2012). It was only after United States rebalancing that the region became unstable as a result of the cold war setting that United States rebalancing has created (Sichun 2012). The United States was seen as provocative in the way that it directly provokes other states to take a tougher stance against China, and in the way that it facilitates other states with its presence and support system that eventually encourage these states to become more assertive (Global Times 2012).

The last attribute is inconsistent. Chinese largely sees the United States as being biased and inconsistent between its statements and its actions (Global Times 2013). The first is related to its repeated statements since the beginning of United States rebalancing that it will remain neutral and that it will take no position in the dispute (Global Times 2012; Global Times 2014). However, United States if not continuously increasing supports to all other claimants are clear evidences that it is no longer neutral in the dispute (Global Times 2012). The second is related to its repeated statements on the freedom of navigation, freedom of flight and international responsibility (Global Times 2012). For some Chinese, it was the United States that is irresponsible in penetrating China's territorial water and uses the notion of freedom of navigation only as a justification to intervene in the dispute (Global Times 2013, Xinhua 2013). A Chinese opinion also highlighted to the fact that China has restrained itself from the use of force as apparent in the composition of China's Marine Surveillance that is mainly civilian (Global Times 2013). It is in contrasted to its equivalence in the United States that consists mainly of military members with offensive weapons (Jilu 2013; Global Times 2012). Related to this, some Chinese considered United States action in criticizing China's activity is biased because it does not do the same to other states whose activity is no less destabilizing than China (Jilu 2013; Global Times 2012). Shortly, Chinese media no longer discounts the impact of United States rebalancing. Even though some opinions prefer China to ignore United States provocation, some begin to suggest a tougher stance against the United States (Global Times 2012).

### **North Korea's Nuclear Program**

In contrast to the South China Sea dispute with its laden nationalism against the U.S, the North Korea's nuclear program is an example of case where Chinese media has demonstrated a more moderate perception toward the United States. There are fewer number of articles on North Korea's nuclear program that specifically discuss the role of the United States, or let alone criticize its actions as compared to those in the South China Sea. More articles are dedicated to focus more on the North Korea itself or its inter-Korean relations.

This, however, does not necessarily mean that the Chinese has positive perception toward the United States either. In terms of intention, Chinese media perceives that United States rebalancing to Korean peninsula is mainly based on its own strategic interests. First, the United States aim to revitalize its strategic alliances with the South Korea and Japan (Shigong 2013). The absence of threat has to some extent raised the question on the relevance of their alliances, and thus maintaining a common threat will provide a justification for the continuity of their alliances (Chung-in 2013).

Second, it aims to maintain United States non-proliferation interest, as it will deter other newly nuclear countries, such as Iran from conducting similar action (Shigong 2013). Third, it is part of the broader United States goal to reestablish its hegemony in Asia by encircling China (Weidong 2013). Many Chinese believe that the United States deliberately tighten its sanction against North Korea in order to provoke the latter to push further its nuclear program (Weidong 2013). By this, the United States has a justification to increase its military presence in the region near China's territory (Linlin 2011). The more aggressive North Korea would also threaten China as its main ally and neighboring state. This, in turn, creates potential friction in their bilateral relations, which according to some opinion, is a favorable situation for the United States to take control of the region (Weidong 2013).

Despite these different perceptions on United States intention, Chinese media perception on United States actions in the Korean peninsula is more uniform in stating that it is destabilizing if not "irritating" for China (Zhanping 2013). United States action in engaging a peaceful talk, while at the same time increasing sanctions and its naval exercises with the South would not be effective because it would only push North Korea closer to its nuclear program (Global Times 2013). As an opinion noted, the very root of North Korea's nuclear program is its insecurity against the joint threats of the United States, Japan, and South Korea to its basic survival (Global Times 2013). Strengthening this trilateral alliance will only create security dilemma that destabilizing not only for North Korea but also China as its closest neighbor. The United States may be too distant to feel the impact of the collapse of North Korea, but China will be among the first that will be threatened by the chaos in this falling nuclear state, the influx of refugees, and the loss of its strategic frontier (Linlin 2011).

Many Chinese, therefore, urged that the United States restrains from provoking North Korea through its joint exercises with the South and resumes Six Party Talk as a multilateral framework to negotiate the issue (W. Gang 2012). The emphasis on multilateralism is important because no single state can deal with North Korea alone. China needs the United States to influence South Korea, while the United States needs China to influence North Korea (Dong-jun 2013).

### **China's Official Policy**

How different then the perception of Chinese media from the official policy of the Chinese government toward the United States? There are definitely similarities and differences between the two. Even though they seem to share the basic principle of China's position in response to United States rebalancing, Chinese official policies have subtler and positive tone toward the United States at least in some aspects of the rebalancing.

In the level of discourse of the overall rebalancing policy, China's government indicates that it welcomes United States presence in the region and that it is ready to cooperate with the United States for the sake of Asia Pacific peace and stability (Xinhua 2012). It acknowledges that the relations between the two are now perhaps the most important bilateral relations in the world, and thus it requires "a new pattern of big power relationship" in order to minimize possible conflict between them (Xinhua 2012). China itself upholds the dual principles of "win-win cooperation," and preservation of national interest (People's Daily 2012). From the very beginning, therefore, it is

clear that China, similar with the United States, is pursuing cooperative approach that contributes to advancing national interests, such as in the area of economy, while at the same time safeguarding their national sovereignty, security, and core interest (People's Daily 2012). It is also unsurprising that after China released its white paper on "peaceful development" outlining how China should "seek mutual benefit and common development with other countries," China released another white paper on "the diversified employment of China's armed" The latter outlines China's military responses against the changing strategic situation in the region, including United States Rebalancing Policy. It is stated that, "some country has strengthened its Asia-Pacific military alliances, expanded its military presence in the region, and frequently makes the situation there tenser" (Chinese Government's Official Web Portal 2011) (Xinhua 2013). Thus, according to this paper China should seek military modernization that meets this changing environment (Chinese Government's Official Web Portal 2011; Xinhua 2013).

The manifestation of this military modernization is more apparent in the case of the South China Sea. Even though China has concentrated its military modernization in the South Fleet Base since 2008, China continues enhancing its military forces in the disputed area, including through the establishment of a new garrison in Sansha City in July 2012, only a month after Panetta announced United States increasing military presence in the region (Shengnan and Yunbi 2012). Sansha City is a newly established administrative unit that covers the disputed islands of Spratly, Paracels, and the Macclesfield Bank. By adding a military garrison, even though it is still in a nascent stage, China aims to strengthen its defense system near the disputed territory. In addition, China also tighten its fishing ban and increased its naval patrol in the South China Sea that often drew criticism from the United States and other countries as it resulted in the increasing number of incidents at the sea (Branigan 2014).

Judging from this tough stance, therefore, China's official perception and policy are more in line with the nationalistic Chinese media perception on the South China Sea than on the overall discourse of United States rebalancing. China's official has consistently emphasized that the South China Sea disputes are disputes between China and some Southeast Asian countries, and thus the solution of the disputes should be resolved through peaceful negotiation between "countries directly involved" as agreed on the Declaration on the Code of Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DoC) signed in 2002 (Xinhua 2012). China sees the United States as a "non-claimant" and "country outside the region" that should not intervene in the dispute (Xinhua 2012). Moreover, the United States has repeatedly convinced China that it "takes no position" in the dispute. Therefore, China expected that the United States abide by its promise, respect the effort China and ASEAN has made, and do more things that help build up trust, peace and stability (Xinhua 2012; Yunbi, Jiao and Chenyan 2012).

In regards to United States concern on the freedom of navigation and freedom of flight, China has reaffirmed that "there has been no such a problem" "nor will there be any problem in the future" (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of the Philippines 2014). It because China also has interests in maintaining the sea-lane of communication for its economic activities. Therefore, according to China, "it is with ulterior motive to play up the concept of 'freedom of navigation in the South China Sea'" (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of the Philippines 2014). Similarly, any United States intervention in the dispute is "an attempt to disrupt China-ASEAN relations" (Xinhua 2012). This perception explains why China rejects

United States proposal to discuss the issue in the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting or let alone to raise the issue to the International Tribunal (Xinhua 2012). For China, the United States is in no position to dictate the solution of the dispute for a simple reason that it is not a party to the dispute itself.

However, this perception is slightly different in the case of North Korea's nuclear program. Similar to the more moderate perception of the Chinese media, China's official policy toward United States rebalancing to the Korean peninsula is also subtler, even though still careful in principle. China's position is clear: it is committed to the "denuclearization" of North Korea and to "the peace and stability" of the Korean peninsula (Xinhua 2014). In regards to the first purpose, China has stated its willingness to cooperate with the United States in the denuclearization of North Korea as was also apparent during the summit between Chinese President Xi Jinping with US President Barack Obama (Xinhua 2013). In fact, China supported United Nations resolution against North Korea's third nuclear test, cut off the latter's financial assets in the Bank of China, and repeatedly pressed the North not to turn the world into chaos for shellfish gain (S. A. Snyder 2013).

Yet, understanding the severe impact of North Korea's collapse on China's security, China emphasized that any actions taken in response to the North's nuclear program should be aimed toward relaxation and safeguarding peace and stability (Xinhua 2014). China repeatedly warned the United States and South Korea that, "country's defense cooperation should be conducive to regional peace, not targeting a third country" (Xinhua 2012). It also reminded them to exercise calmness and restraint, be discreet in word and deed, and proceed from the long-term interest rather than self-gain (Xinhua 2012; Xinhua 2013). Similar with Chinese media, China's official policy also put at the front the importance of resuming the Six-Party Talk as a multilateral venue to discuss North Korea's nuclear program (Xinhua 2012). For China, it is all relevant parties, and not China alone, that have the responsibility to work together for the denuclearization of the North.

## **Conclusion**

This paper begins with the purpose of examining the impact of United States Rebalancing Policy to Asia. It holds the basic assumption that the impact of United States rebalancing will depend largely on how China perceives United States increasing presence in the region. In this regard, this paper focuses on examining the role of media in shaping the dynamics of China's perception toward the United States during the last two years of rebalancing. As the existing literature indicates, China's media has become increasingly important in Chinese foreign policy making, particularly toward the U.S, through its direct and indirect role. The two key questions being asked in this paper are how Chinese media perceives United States Rebalancing Policy and how it differs from the official position. The last two sections have elaborated extensively the findings of this study; therefore, this concluding section will be dedicated to explain the meaning and the implication of the finding itself.

First, in contrast to the common assumption that sweeps the impact of United States rebalancing to Asia as destabilizing both in its relations with China and the regional stability in general, this paper demonstrated that this is a simplifying view. Chinese media's and China's government perception toward the United States are varied across



cases of United States rebalancing policy. In line with the proposed hypothesis of this paper, China's media and government perceive a more destabilizing impact of United States rebalance in cases related directly to its national sovereignty and less so in other security cases.

The South China Sea Dispute and the North Korea's nuclear program have well demonstrated this contrasting impact of the U.S rebalance on Chinese's media and government perception. Even though North Korea is a crucial security issue for China, this is still an area that China can compromise or an area that China itself depends on the United States in finding the solution of the issue. China needs United States influence in international organizations as well its influence on its military allies in the region, i.e. Japan and South Korea. United States rebalancing, in this sense, offers an opportunity for building mutual trust and greater cooperation between the two that they often refer to as a new type of great power relationship. Moreover, China has demonstrated a more cooperative approach toward the United States after North Korea's third nuclear test in 2013. The United States should use this opportunity to also demonstrate its positive response by reducing what China perceives as United States provocative actions. In contrast, knowing that China perceives the destabilizing impact of United States rebalancing in cases related to China's sovereignty, the United States should also be more careful in intervening in other cases, such as Taiwan and the East China Sea dispute.

Second, despite of this positive development, this paper demonstrated that there is still an entrenched distrust both in the government and the Chinese media toward the United States, indicating the fragility of the current and future relations between the two. The fact that Chinese media and public has more negative perception toward the United States is even more alarming for their future interaction considering that China is moving toward greater openness and more participative foreign policy making. China's negative perception toward the United States, at least from the study of this paper, stemmed from two mutually reinforcing trends. The first is the development within the China itself where it has already had a long history of anti-Americanism and compounded with the rise of China that strengthens the sense of national pride against other countries. Moreover, the Communist party also uses nationalism as the foundation of its legitimacy after the end of communism. The second, as has been demonstrated by this paper is the United States actions in various issues related to China. Similar to the North Korea, China's assertiveness also rooted from its sense of insecurity against the increasing United States presence in the region. Even though it diplomatically welcomes United States rebalance, and is willing to cooperate in the North Korea's nuclear program, China still holds negative perception toward United States intention in the region. The recurring attributes that are found in this paper are Chinese perception that United States has demonstrated interventionist, provocative, and inconsistent policies in regards to China. Improving China's distrust, therefore, involves United States effort in demonstrating self-restraint in all of the above three areas.

Last, there must be questions of whether and how these Chinese media perception affects Chinese foreign policy making. Establishing the connection between the two is definitely challenging. However, given the literature studies and the findings of this paper itself, there is indeed relation between Chinese media perception and China's foreign policies toward United States rebalance that occurs in two-way interactions. The fact that various opinions exist in the new media reflects that it is a genuine voices

and public opinion toward the government. The fact that it appears in Chinese media, on the other hand, reflects that it is in line with the government policies. Either way, these voices are important in the way that it “represents” the government policy and in the way that it can invite the reactions from other countries.

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