

Capitalist Development, China's Rise and US State Managers: Explaining 'Pivot to Asia' with Marxists Lenses

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Introduction

In this paper I will attempt to sketch a Marxist theory of imperialism for American foreign policy and Barack Obama's government strategy over the Pacific water mass. Marxism for many years has been a 'lame duck' *vis-à-vis* International Relations (IR) because Karl Marx did not provide a consistent theory of the state. Economic determinism dominated accounts of imperialism. Furthermore, because of its focus on systemic processes, Marxism has been at odds with foreign policy.

The shift brought in the balance of economic and military power by the uneven development of capitalism, and rising expansionist discourses – in Russia and China - demand for further work on the role of the state in international relations, as the era in which many claimed for the withering of the latter seems to be ending.¹

The one presented here is a new approach to IR and foreign policy; however as a method it takes inspiration from suggestions of Eugene R. Wittkopf and James N. Rosenau. The former saw American foreign policy not as the result of national interests, but as 'the product of a complex political process anchored in tradition and colored by contemporary developments at home and abroad.'² Foreign policy in general should be accounted for as the product of hierarchically ordered determinations – factors. Rosenau for instance, considered the forces determining foreign policy outcomes with a total view. The agencies he thought of were the global arena, the domestic social arena, the institutional

organization of the state, the roles of policy makers, and the personal characteristics of those elites that hold power. While on the one hand this is the best way to approach foreign policy, particularly in the US, in this paper I present a framework which methodologically follows a similar order of determinations, but in terms of contents it remains faithful to Marxism.³

Uneven development of capitalism and material values of territory

The major pressure to which state managers are subjected is the uneven development of capitalism. Capitalism spreads its forces unevenly on different geographical scales. In global cities, uneven development can be seen in their fragmented dispersion of wealth and poverty throughout the urban area. On a national scale, this is represented by the many North-South, West-East, and coastal-inland economic divides that nowadays profoundly characterize developed and developing countries. On a global/international scale instead, the uneven development of capitalism can be observed in the rise and fall of great powers of the kind discussed by Vladimir Lenin.

For Lenin capitalism did not favor reinvestment of profits in the same national territory in order to improve people standard of living, but it aimed at 'exporting capital abroad to the backward countries' where profits could be

¹ R. O'Brien, *Global Financial Integration: The End of Geography* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1992).

² E.R. Wittkopf & C.M. Jones, *American Foreign Policy: Pattern and Process* (Thomson Wadsworth, 2008), pp. 14-5.

³ J.N. Rosenau, 'Pre-Theories and Theories of Foreign Policy', in R. Barry Farrell (ed.), *Approaches to Comparative and International Politics* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press), pp. 27-92.

higher.⁴ It goes without saying that, once the previously backward countries industrialized, these were searching for investments somewhere else and increased their geopolitical expectations.

Countries therefore follow the sort of cyclical pattern in which there is '1) low economic growth due to capital constraint', followed by '2) high economic growth by dissolution of the constraint' and '3) low economic growth due to labor constraint.'⁵ This process on the one hand triggers development around the world. On the other hand, it unleashes forces which produce new rivals for already developed countries which fight for the 'most highly industrialized regions (German appetite for Belgium; French appetite for Lorraine)';⁶ while territorial conquest becomes a mean 'to weaken the adversary and undermine his hegemony'.⁷ States need to promote conditions of profitability domestically or abroad for their private capitals, and because they want to maintain economic growth through taxation and reception of foreign direct investments (FDIs) competition brings to a re-division of spheres of economic and military influence.

State-capital relations

On a second level of determination lies the pressure exerted by economic actors on the foreign policy process. This factor is between the systemic and the agential realm and it concerns with the relation between the state and capitalist monopolies, multinational corporations (MNCs), banks and insurance

⁴ V. Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (New York: International Publishers, 1939), p. 63. Written between January and June of 1916, first published in mid-1917.

⁵ H. Onishi, 'Uneven Development of the World Economy: from Krugman to Lenin', Working Paper 101, Graduate School of Economics, Kyoto University, February, 2009, p. 10, online at <http://www.econ.kyoto-u.ac.jp/~chousa/WP/101.pdf> (last accessed 30 October 2015)

⁶ Lenin, p. 91.

⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 91-2. See also core-periphery shifts in I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 2011), p. 350.

companies. Classical Marxist theories of imperialism, such as those of Hobson, Hilferding, Bukharin and Lenin, argued in different ways that the causes for aggressive foreign policies were to be found in the symbiotic relation between state and big industrial-financial combines. Monopolies grew so big that they had the power to take control of the highest spheres of the state and use them to pursue a scramble for the material values of territory: natural resources, cheap labor, markets, legal and physical infrastructure. Particularly for Bukharin, it was the state sponsoring of national monopolies which brought to clashes between capitalist states.⁸

A milestone in this strand of literature remains the work of Gabriel Kolko. The latter believes that the American business class is extremely influent, and it has effective informal mechanisms to co-opt if not corrupt state managers and to make their vision of economic policy translated into policy of the state.⁹

Despite the liberal background of his work Joseph S. Nye, Jr. found three areas in which big businesses intervene in world politics - 'direct role' in 'private foreign policy', when multinationals pressure a host country; 'unintended direct role' of 'instruments of influence' for governments; 'indirect roles' of 'setting the agenda' of a government.¹⁰

Future researchers started to see classical Marxist theories of imperialism as flawed by economic determinism. Fred Block overcame this problem by considering a reciprocal interaction between state managers and big business. For Block, while on the one hand capitalists look at egoistic short-term interests,

⁸ A. Brewer, *Marxist Theories of Imperialism: A Critical Survey* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990).

⁹ G. Kolko, *Main Currents in Modern American History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), chs. 7 and 8. Quoted in P. Gowan, 'Global Economy', in Michael Cox & Doug Stokes, *US Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 339.

¹⁰ Like in the case of liberalization for trade with the Soviet Union. J. S. Nye, Jr., 'Multinationals: The Game and the Rules: Multinational Corporations in World Politics', in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (October, 1974), pp.153-175.

state managers are concerned by the long-term economic health and power of the state. They still have to rely on private economy, because economic health is synonymous of public support and a high inflow of revenues through taxation, but they are driven by an interest different from that of big business.¹¹ Recently, Third-wave theories of imperialism developed an understanding of imperialism where state managers' logic interact with that of capital or it filtrates it through their ideologies.¹²

The foreign policy level: national territory and state managers

Forces at the agential level then metabolize and translate economic pressures into foreign policy. This paper focuses on the link between ideologies of state managers and territory.¹³ In this sense classical geopolitics provides some important insight. While realism describes the state as a static and monolithic container, the tension between the finite and infinite that is at the base of classical geopolitics¹⁴ reveals another tension between the bordered sovereign state and the borderland of the nation.¹⁵ This dichotomy was highlighted in Ratzel's theory and in Hitler's *bodenpolitik*, or soil politics ('blood and soil').¹⁶ As the boundaries of the nation do not overlap with those of the state and at the same time are less defined,¹⁷ the state is only relatively fixed and therefore is prone to expansionism.¹⁸

This aspect was also acknowledged, more

subtly, by Henri Lefebvre. For the latter – a Marxist thinker - space had to be considered as a social relation,¹⁹ however 'the understanding of space cannot reduce the lived to the conceived, nor the body to a geometric or optical abstraction. On the contrary: this understanding must begin with the lived and the body, that is, from a space occupied by an organic, living, and thinking being. This being has (is) its space, circumscribed in its immediate surroundings, but threatened or favored by that which is distant.'²⁰

If looked through these lenses, space happens to have semantic values, in addition to the material values needed by capitalism.²¹ Tangible characteristics entail 'control over a particular territory, the protection of an ethnic minority, or the removal of a particular leader', while for intangible ones can refer to 'influence, prestige, or ideology.'²²

While these theories may seem to apply more directly to Russian and Chinese imperialism, how would they fit with regard to a country whose foreign policy was apparently more driven by 'morality and economics', rather than geopolitics?²³ In the United States, the relative fixity of national territory and historical and symbolical meaning attached to it could be found in the Puritan idea of a nation 'imbued with a sacred calling' and 'the belief — derived from the War of Independence— that a republic endowed with a constitution of liberty for all times' was born.²⁴ The encroachment between material and symbolic values of territory and their fusion in the need of security is better represented by Manifest Destiny, a

¹¹ F. Block, *Revising State Theory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987).

¹² David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2005)

¹³ In a more complete study, groups interests and institutional mechanisms should also be considered.

¹⁴ M. Ruggiano, *L'infinito nella sensibilità romantica* (Benevento: Ricolo, 1981).

¹⁵ This is in addition to the tension between free flowing capitals and territorially fixed states usually considered by Marxist geographers

¹⁶M. Bassin, 'Imperialism and the nation state in Friedrich Ratzel's political geography', *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol.11 (1987), pp. 484, 475.

¹⁷ P. Dicken, *Global Shift: Mapping the Changing Contours of the World Economy* (New York & London: The Guilford Press, 2011), p. 172.

¹⁸ For an American version of this aspects, see the works of Frederick Jackson Turner.

¹⁹ H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford & Malden MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991), p. 26.

²⁰ H. Lefebvre, *State, Space, World: Selected Essays*, Edited by Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 226..

²¹ D.J. Dzurek, 'What Makes Territory Important: Tangible and Intangible Dimensions', in *GeoJournal*, Vol. 64, No. 4 (2005), p. 263.

²² P.R. Hensel & S. McLaughlin Mitchell, 'Issue Indivisibility and Territorial Claims', in *GeoJournal*, Vol. 64, No. 4 (2005), p. 275

²³ P. Anderson, 'Consilium', in *New Left Review*, Vol. 83 (September/October, 2013), p. 115.

²⁴ P. Anderson, 'Imperium', in *New Left Review*, Vol. 83 (September/October), 2013, p. 5.

socio-ideological dimension in which the expansionism of both capitalism and American culture are attached together. Manifest Destiny in American history has been expressed under different sub-ideologies and parties currents.²⁵ The contradiction between expansionism and universalism embedded in these discourses, explain the lack of formal territorial occupation by the United States, which clashes with extraordinary number of military bases around the world and patrolling of the global common.²⁶

IV – *The changing world order: towards multipolarity?*²⁷

In section I a dealt with a theoretical perspective on how capitalism shapes the balance of global economic power. In this section instead I remind how a world which was going to become global and borderless, found itself very territory-attached after the 2007-08 economic crisis. The world order as we have known it over the last decades went through an historical shift which can be seen in the reshuffling on a global scale of the relations of economic and military power.

Starting from the '80s the international economic system experienced the entrance into the 'Age of Transformation' with Eastern Europe, China, India and South America adhering to global capitalism.²⁸ The relation

between financial markets and national monetary authorities was equaled to that between a 'tiger' and its 'tamer'.²⁹ Trade average expansion and FDI were 'stronger than in the first wave of globalization' from 1850 to 1913' and world poverty decreased.³⁰ In the '90s, the fall of the last great power favored the passage to the 'Age of Optimism', with geoeconomy making its way into different narratives because security was thought to have become post-geopolitical, and territorial control counterproductive.³¹ Slogans such as 'peace dividend' and 'enemies become friends' appeared, as URRS' fall meant 'strategic pause' for Washington.³² This intellectual upheaval was underpinned by novelties in military affairs.³³ Security was better understood and practiced as 'horizontally extended'.³⁴ The best portrait of this period was Thomas Barnett's map, as the

²⁵ W. R. Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* (New York: Knopf, 2001); "war is inherent in this doctrine", as argued in R. Coles, 'Manifest Destiny Adapted for 1990s' War Discourse: Mission and Destiny Intertwined', in *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 63, No. 4 (Winter, 2002), p. 404; for the development of a different spectrum of approaches to foreign policy, see B. R. Posen & A. L. Ross, 'Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy', in *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Winter, 1996/97), pp. 5-53.

²⁶ C. Lutz, *The Bases of Empire* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); J. Gerson, and B. Birchard, *The Sun Never Sets: Confronting the Network of Foreign U.S. Military Bases* (Boston: South End Press, 1991).

²⁷ This section draws on a paper titled 'From Unipolarity to Multipolarity: Changing Capitalist Development and the Return of the State in International Security' which I presented at the conference on *Global insecurities: emerging security challenges in a nexus between networks and remoteness* (University of Bristol, 29 November, 2014),.

²⁸ Gideon Rachman, *Zero-Sum World: Politics, Power and Prosperity After the Crash* (London: Atlantic Books, 2011).

²⁹ F. Saccomanni, *Managing International Financial Instability: National Tamers Versus Global Tigers* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2008); A. Elson, *Governing Global Finance: The Evolution and Reform of the International Financial Architecture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 75-76.

³⁰ World Trade Organisation, *World Trade Report 2008: Trade in a Globalizing World* (2008), pp. 15-19, accessible online at https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/anrep_e/world_trade_report08_e.pdf (last accessed 30 October 2015).

³¹ J. Mercille, 'The radical geopolitics of US foreign policy: Geopolitical and Geoeconomic Logics of Power', in *Political Geography*, Vol. 27, No. 5 (2008), p. 576; M. Sparke, 'Geopolitical Fear, Geoeconomic Hope and the Responsibilities of Geography', in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 97, No. 2 (2007), p. 339, reprinted in *Geopolitica: Revista de Geografie Politica, GeoPolitica si GeoStrategie*, Anul VIII, Nr. 36-37 (2011) and in Klaus Dodds (ed.), *SAGE Library of International Relations: Geopolitics* (Vols. 1-4). (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2009).

³² Lawrence Freedman, 'The Revolution in Strategic Affairs', in *Adelphi Paper 318*, International Institute for Strategic Studies, Vol. 38, No. 318 (1998), p. 5; C. Kupchan, *How Enemies Become Friends: The Sources of Stable Peace* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

³³ F. W. Kagan, 'The U.S. Military's Manpower Crisis', in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 4 (July/August 2006), pp. 97-110.

³⁴ E. Rothschild, 'What Is Security?', in *Daedalus*, Vol. 124, No. 3 (Summer, 1995), pp. 53-98. For post-modern warfare see A. Bousquet, 'War', in Nash, Kate *et al.*, *The New Blackwell Companion to Political Sociology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011).

new enemies were spaceless and transnational.³⁵

The death of territory however, contrasted with the fact US, while policing the globe for its Global War On Terrorism (GWOT), it developed a network of bases and alliances ready to counter China in Asia and in sub-Saharan Africa.³⁶ Blind confidence on the success of globalization in bringing an equal distribution of power did not last, as the passage to multipolarity was approaching rapidly with an unprecedented transfer of economic power from West to East.³⁷ It seemed clear that the twenty-first was going to be the 'Chinese century'.³⁸ With regard to China, this brought many authors to focus their attention on the eventuality of a passage of hegemony between US and China or a struggle for it. However these authors' conclusions were looking more like forecasts³⁹ and recommendations,⁴⁰ or as study of China's world vision.⁴¹ An interest in the internal dynamics which drive the foreign policy-making process was missing.

³⁵ T.P. Barnett, *The Pentagon's new map: War and peace in the twenty-first century* (New York: Putnam, 2004).

³⁶ John Gershman, 'US: Remaking Policy in Asia', in *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 22 November 2002; republished in *Asia Times*, 6 November 2002, accessible online at <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Japan/DK26Dh02.html> (last accessed 30 October 2015); Z. Leoni, 'US Security Strategy in South Sudan: An Anti-China Strategy?', in *Sudan Tribune*, 3 May 2013, online at <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article46437>.

See above for U.S.' bases

³⁷ National Intelligence Council, 'Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World' (US Government Printing Office, November 2008), p. VI, accessible online at: <http://www.aicpa.org/research/cpahorizons2025/globalforces/downloadabledocuments/globaltrends.pdf>.

³⁸ Ted C. Fishman, 'The Chinese Century', in *The New York Times*, 4 July 2004, online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/07/04/magazine/04CHINA.html> (last accessed 30 October 2015).

³⁹ J.J. Mearsheimer, 'China's Unpeaceful Rise', in *Current History*, Vol. 105, No. 690 (2006), pp. 160-2.

⁴⁰ G.J. Ikenberry, 'The Rise of China and the Future of the West: Can the Liberal System Survive?', in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 1 (January/February, 2008), pp. 23-37.

⁴¹ R.L. Schweller & X. Pu, 'After Unipolarity: China's Visions of International Order in an Era of U.S. Decline', in *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Summer, 2011), pp. 41-72

V: Contrasting visions in the Democratic Party and the Pivot to Asia to counter China

A split inside the Democratic Party

At the agential level, the link between capitalist development, businesses pressures and symbolical values of territory can be found in the different agencies, such as the working of institutions in the US with its key positions occupied by different parties, path dependency, roles of policy-makers and party ideologies. In this last section I consider ideology at a low level of abstraction. As the ideological spectrum in the U.S. is a moderate one, the Democratic Party does not contain any really alternative vision of foreign policy compared to the Republicans. This means that, whoever governs, be this the 'hawkish' George W. Bush or the 'gentleman' Barack Obama, the substance is likely to remain intact. However differences in timing of policies and intensity in the deployment of power can appear in the final adjustment of a foreign policy mainly determined by forces outlined in the first two sections.

The clash between realists and idealists is an old parameter for the study of US foreign policy one. However since William Clinton election this divide has been interiorized by the Democratic Party. The latter went through a transformation during the 1980s which moved the ideological posture of the party 'toward the center of the political spectrum'. This shift was led by the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), which challenged the main ideology of Democrats after the left wing of the party dominated in the '60s and '70s.⁴² And it arose from the necessity to 'break the Republican hold on the White House' after years.⁴³ As Hale reminded 'the party that does not hold the White House faces the need to generate ideas and policy responses that can form the basis of a message and agenda in the next election'.⁴⁴

⁴² An 'unofficial group' of the Democratic Party; its think tank is the Progressive Policy Institute.

⁴³ J.F. Hale, 'The Making of the New Democrats', in *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 110, No. 2, (Summer, 1995), p. 207.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 208.

The centrist wing is favorable to the use of military force, it adheres unconditionally to neoliberalism and endorses a light welfare. The second one supports a more extensive welfare and is suspicious of easy going approaches to military interventions. This split is considered to be still valid, and is likely to emerge loudly during the next Democrats primaries and in an eventual blue government between Hillary Clinton and Senator Elizabeth Warren.⁴⁵

This division was also central to the first Obama's administration – with the president being more cognate to the liberal wing, and Hillary Clinton to the centrist one - despite there is who sees the latter as split along three generational lines: one from the post-Vietnam era – e.g. Joe Biden – disappointed by the Vietnam catastrophe, but repented not to have supported First Gulf War and therefore then supported the Second Gulf War; a second one led by the Clintons and which sees the American power as 'indispensable'; a third one, that of the Obamians, which has been profoundly affected by the wicked use of military force after September the 11th.⁴⁶

Barack Obama vs. Hillary Clinton

Barack Obama declared to be 'not a particularly ideological person'.⁴⁷ Despite observers said he

⁴⁵ Political analyst Stuart Rothenberg commented: 'We're seeing the same sort of division in the Democratic Party now that we saw throughout the 1980s.' See David J. Lynch, 'Inside the Democratic Party Split: Pragmatists Vs. True Believers', in *Bloomberg*, 19 December 2014, online at <http://www.bloomberg.com/politics/articles/2014-12-19/populists-press-democrats-to-ease-clintonera-embrace-of-bankers> (last accessed 30 October 2015).

⁴⁶ James Mann, 'US Role in Asia and the World', lecture in the *America's Role in the World: Global Agenda 2013 Speaker Series*, University of Delaware, accessible online at <http://www.udel.edu/udaily/2013/mar/mann-asia-pivot-032113.html> (last accessed 30 October 2015). See also Idem., *The Obamians: The Struggle Inside the White House to Redefine American Power* (New York: Viking, 2012).

⁴⁷ P. Rucker, 'Obama: I'm 'Not a Particularly Ideological Person'', *The Washington Post*, 25 November 2013, online at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-politics/wp/2013/11/25/obama-says-house-republicans-are-biggest-barrier-to-progress> (last accessed 30 October 2015).

does not have a doctrine,⁴⁸ his approach to American power has been rational, balanced and one of prioritizing, as the efforts spent on domestic economy demonstrate. By stating that 'America has shown arrogance and it has been dismissive, even derisive', he opposed a fanatic approach to American power.⁴⁹ And his foreign policy has been affected by the weight of the version of Manifest Destiny he personally embeds. The mandate he received from electors was to show the rest of the world that once again American had something to teach: how to change and renew itself, how to fix mistakes.

Somebody called him a 'consequentialist'.⁵⁰ And not by chance Obama attacked Hillary Clinton by arguing that Bush junior's foreign policy was the continuation of her husband's foreign policy.⁵¹ The president was not wrong if considered that Clinton 'repeatedly aligned herself with the most consistent realist in the Obama administration', such as Secretary of Defense Robert Gates – who covered the same position with Bush – and who had influence over Obama's national security strategy.⁵²

Clinton translated to her electors Obama's apparently moderate messages as incapability to deal with '3 A.M.' emergencies.⁵³ But to believe that Obama has or would put an end to American imperialism is a utopia at the list. As he confirmed during his last West Point speech: 'the United States will use military force, unilaterally if necessary, when our core interests demand it — when our people are threatened;

⁴⁸ D. W. Drezner, 'Does Obama Have a Grand Strategy', in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 4 (July/August, 2011), pp. 57-68.

⁴⁹ E. J. Dionne Jr., 'The Obama Doctrine in Action', in *The Washington Post*, 16 April 2009, online at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/04/15/AR2009041502902.html> (last accessed 30 October 2015).

⁵⁰ R. Lyzza, 'Obama: The Consequentialist', in James M. McCormick, *The Domestic Sources of American Power* (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012; 6th edition), p. 434.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 431

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 435; Z. Brzezinski, 'From Hope to Audacity: Appraising Obama's Foreign Policy', in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 89, No. 1 (January/February, 2010), p. 18.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 432.

when our livelihoods are at stake; when the security of our allies is in danger.⁵⁴

The United States of America already maintained under observation Asia and China since the 1997, and during the Bush's years. However all this could not be compared with the level of attention rose within the Obama's administration.⁵⁵ The main reason for this shift was the fact that the crisis and the uneven development of capitalism had made of China and the Pacific a fundamental area for shipping, mineral and fishing resources, and military strategy.⁵⁶ But the approach to China will also depend on the balance of forces inside the American government.

The two wings and China

In the distribution of financial resources for national security in 2016, pivot to Asia will be the container to benefit most.⁵⁷ In commenting the announcement of the new budget, Secretary of State John Kerry stated that the pivot, which got the biggest share, is 'a top

⁵⁴ D. Hudson, "'America Must Always Lead": President Obama Addresses West Point Graduates', *The White House Blog*, 28 May 2014, online at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2014/05/28/america-must-always-lead-president-obama-addresses-west-point-graduates> (last accessed 30 October 2015).

⁵⁵ Robert S. Ross, 'The Problem with the Pivot: Obama's New Asia Policy is Unnecessary and Counterproductive', in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 6 (November/December, 2012), pp. 70-82; J. A. Bader, *Obama and China's Rise* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 2012), p. 3. For a bullet-points illustration of Obama's strategy towards Asia, which lies in the middle between unilateralism and tolerance, see *Ibid.*, pp. 6-8.

⁵⁶ G. P. Hastedt, *American Foreign Policy: Past, Present and Future* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), p. 30; M. S. Indyk, K. G. Lieberthal & M. E. O'Hanlon, *Bending History: Barack Obama's Foreign Policy* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2012), p. 30.

⁵⁷ G. Ratnam & K. Brannen, 'Against Other Threats, Obama's Security Budget Sticks to Asia-Pacific Pivot', in *Foreign Policy*, 2 February 2015, online at https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/02/02/793982budget-asia-pacific-syria-iraq-russia-ukraine/?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_term=%2ASituation%20Report&utm_campaign=Sit%20Rep%20February%203%202015 (last accessed 30 October 2015).

priority for every one of us in administration.⁵⁸

The history of US grand strategy and a Marxist approach to it, tell that no president or political faction would challenge the American quest for security and economic primacy, and in a way Kerry's words remind that there is not a fundamental difference on the way American state managers imagine US grand strategy. However, to agree on the importance of shifting towards Asia it does not mean that everyone sees it at the same way: 'Some in the administration, especially in the State Department, viewed this policy primarily in terms of contrasting Chinese threats to the region. The president, however [...] viewed a successful overall regional strategy as vital for U.S. national interests and remained convinced of the feasibility and importance of seeking win-win cooperation with China to the extent possible over the long run.'⁵⁹

When Obama entered the White House in fact, it could be noticed a general 'promising start'.⁶⁰ This regarded in particular issues such as global crisis management, climate change and nuclear proliferation.⁶¹ But security came down to be a horse of different color, as China became more assertive.⁶² For 'pivot to Asia' in fact, 2011 was the topical year. Despite the formal words of respects which are always part of high-level diplomatic communication, Hillary Clinton made clear that she was committed 'to sustain our leadership, secure our interests, and advance our values', and that US would have not receded of a centimeter with regard to 'freedom of navigation in South China Sea' – something China will not accept.⁶³ James Steinberg, James Bader, and Jon Huntsman, the most experts on the international relations of Asia in the Obama's administration, had to

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Indyk et al., *Bending History*, p. 30.

⁶⁰ D. E. Sanger, *Power and Conceal: Obama's Secret Wars and Surprising Use of American Power* (New York: Broadway Paperbacks, 2012), p. 377.

⁶¹ Indyk et al., *Bending History*, pp. 30-8.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ H. Clinton, 'America's Pacific Century', in *Foreign Policy*, 11 October 2011, online at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/americas-pacific-century> (last accessed 30 October 2015); Sanger, *Power and Conceal*, p. 395.

resign because the aggressive rise of China was *de facto* defeating their approach to diplomacy, and 'strategic reassurance' was seen as confusing and ineffective as a strategy.⁶⁴

That there were and still there are clashes, and that these clashes could affect the 'pivot', was also noted in a bipartisan letter sent to Obama by four senators, asking to constitute a leading interagency to clarify the strategy and not to leave it to 'speeches, interviews, and articles' of many individuals and institutions.⁶⁵

The split is more than unofficial, but to believe that Barack Obama and those official allied to him are against pivoting to Asia, would be incorrect as it is in the DNA of American grand strategy to control and secure the strategic regions of the world, and now the Pacific has become the new Middle East of even more important. Obama in fact had 'acknowledged the rise of China before election, and argued that Bush mistake was to engage in Asia'.⁶⁶

However while initially president Obama was dialoguing with the military establishment for adding more troops in Afghanistan - in parallel with the implementation of an exit strategy from Iraq - he was challenged by some of his new advisers, among which a loud voice was that of Richard Holbrooke. The latter thought that spending more energies in Afghanistan was 'counterproductive', and it would have not eased the concentration of financial and military resources into the Pacific Rim.⁶⁷ This

⁶⁴ J. Rogin, 'The End of the Concept of 'Strategic Reassurance'', in *Foreign Policy*, 6 November 2009, online at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/11/06/the-end-of-the-concept-of-strategic-reassurance> (last accessed 30 October 2015); W. Lowther, 'Obama's top China hand Jeffrey Bader leaves job', in *Taipei Times*, 14 April 2011, online at <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2011/04/14/2003500707> (last accessed 30 October 2015); also see Indyk et al., *Bending History*, p. 56.

⁶⁵ Z. Keck, 'US Lawmakers Call for Strategic Review of Pivot', *The Diplomat*, 25 July 2013, online at <http://thediplomat.com/2013/07/us-lawmakers-call-for-strategic-review-of-pivot/> (last accessed 30 October 2015).

⁶⁶ Indyk et al., *Bending History*, pp. 25, 42.

⁶⁷ Lyzza, 'Obama: The Consequentialist', p. 436.

opposition happened not by chance. Holbrooke had been Hillary Clinton's lead foreign policy advisor during the presidential campaign and potential Secretary of State, and Obama had vetoed his candidature for becoming Clinton's deputy.⁶⁸

During the second term of Obama observers have had the feeling the rebalancing has slowed down.⁶⁹ But this is probably just a matter of time. The reasons for the slowing down of the pivot completion on the one hand has to do with the difficulties in developing the Trans-Pacific Partnership.⁷⁰ On the other hand the Obama II has changed some key personality, and certainly in the latter there has been less space for the democratic hawks and aggressive rhetoric about China. Obama chose individuals which were on his side 'since his first days in office or earlier' while Clinton and her assistant Kurt Campbell left.⁷¹ Probably Campbell had been one of the few to juxtapose the word 'rivalry' to China.⁷² Compared to the Obama I, a higher degree of union characterized the second term.⁷³

The divide inside the Democratic Party seemed to be less sharp when it came to the Trans-Pacific Partnership, with regard to which frictions arose along the institutional lines. While in the negotiations for the TPP the Obama's administration has led with less

⁶⁸ Vali Nasr, 'The Inside Story of How the White House Let Diplomacy Fail in Afghanistan', in *Foreign Policy*, 4 March 2013, online at

<http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/03/04/the-inside-story-of-how-the-white-house-let-diplomacy-fail-in-afghanistan> (last accessed 30 October 2015).

⁶⁹ M. Auslin, 'The Slow Death of Obama's Asia Pivot', in *The Wall Street Journal*, 3 February 2014, online at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303942404579360282240892994> (last accessed 30 October 2015).

⁷⁰ For a recent technical account on the Trans-Pacific Partnership see T. Voon, *Trade Liberalisation and International Cooperation: A Legal Analysis of the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement* (Cheltenham & Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2013).

⁷¹ S. Tsai, 'Obama's Second Term in the Asia-Pacific Region: Reflecting on the Past, Looking to the Future', in *Project 2049 Institute* (September, 2013), p. 17.

⁷² Sanger, *Power and Conceal*, p. 399.

⁷³ Tsai, 'Obama's Second Term', p. 22.

contrasts, it encountered opposition from Democrats seating in the Congress at the time of asking for fast-track. The Congress so far has been taken out of the TPP affair and generally from the 'pivot to Asia'.⁷⁴ This clash has confirmed the support for economic expansionism inherent by the members of the Democratic Party which occupy government positions.⁷⁵

Conclusion

This paper put forward some suggestions for a Marxist theory of foreign policy which can be better understood as the result of a three-tiered process. This process goes through, first of all, the imbalances of global economic power generated by the uneven development of capitalism. Secondly, the threat of economic stagnation sets the stage for a dialectic between state managers and by big business, where the latter pose a powerful pressure on the former. Finally, the previous two pressures are then metabolized by the agents of foreign policy. In the latter, state managers' ideologies start to work and economic pressures are filtrated according to politicians worldview and interests. Meanwhile, the world has been transformed by the crisis of the West and the rise of China and other East Asian states: the Pacific basin has become the most strategic region in the world, at which multinational enterprises look with greediness. That could be sufficient to outline the fundamental tenets of US grand strategy. However in this paper I suggested that the divide in the Obama's administration, or better, the ideological divide inner to the Democratic Party, it is a factor to consider in order to understand the timing and the intensity of foreign policy outcomes. Certainly, within a world order switching from uni-polarity to multi-polarity, the likely return on power of an hawkish administration – whether run by Hillary Clinton supported also by some Republicans, or by the Republican

Party itself – it represents a further step towards an international system characterized by states rivalries.

⁷⁴ S. Srinivas, 'Democrats oppose Obama's demand for fast-tracking Pacific trade deal', in *The Guardian*, 21 January 2015, online at <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/jan/21/democrats-oppose-obama-fast-track-trade-agreement> (last accessed 30 October 2015).

⁷⁵ Bader, *Obama and China's Rise*, p. 5.